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**London Jewry and the First World War
Patriotisms, Identity and the Politics of Integration**

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London Jewry and the First World War:
Patriotisms, Identity and the Politics of
Integration

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King's College London June 2017

Abstract

This thesis re-examines London Jewry's experience of The First World War and demonstrates the unprecedented impact of the conflict on the development of the community. The thesis examines the impact of the war on Jewish nationalism in the British context. It demonstrates how active service during the war instilled a Jewish patriotism, fed by the experiences of antisemitism in the British Army, the Balfour Declaration and service in Palestine. The reality and rhetoric of British antisemitism are examined in the context of highly visible events such as the Bethnal Green disturbances of September 1917 and the minutiae of Jew and Gentile relations in the trenches and on the Home Front. This involves a wider discussion on how British society interacted with its minority groups in the conditions of total war, with the London Jewish community the primary case study for this discussion. The war provided a business boom for Jewish tailors, relaxation of naturalisation laws and for many established Jews a vindication of their status as Britons through service and sacrifice on the front line. Conversely it saw a sharp increase in antagonism towards Jews on the Home Front and a crisis over Russian Jewish conscription that threatened to permanently undermine the position of the community in British society. The war deepened divisions between the established and immigrant halves of London's Jewish community and accelerated the latter's integration into British society. This thesis re-examines the First World War as an important event in the historiography of British Jewry in its own right rather than as a dramatic interruption in its progress.

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List of Abbreviations

AJA	Anglo-Jewish Association
BBL	British Brother's League
BoD	Board of Deputies of British Jews
BUF	British Union of Fascists
EEF	Egyptian Expeditionary Force
<i>ELA</i>	<i>East London Advertiser</i>
<i>ELO</i>	<i>East London Observer</i>
EZF	English Zionist Federation
FJPC	Foreign Jews Protection Committee
FO	Foreign Office
HO	Home Office
IWM	Imperial War Museum
<i>JC</i>	<i>Jewish Chronicle</i>
JHSE	Jewish Historical Society of England
JLB	Jewish Lads' Brigade
JML	Jewish Museum of London
JRC	Jewish Regiment Committee
LMA	London Metropolitan Archives
NA	National Archives (Kew)
PRO	Public Record Office
WNC	War Emergency Workers National Committee
WO	War Office

Introduction: Popular and Scholarly Remembrance of London Jewry and the First World War

The First World War transformed British Jewry more than any comparative event in the community's history since readmission to Britain in 1656. The conflict presented challenging questions for British Jews forcing them to engage with their home nation based on values of patriotism, loyalty, and national identity as a minority group. This went far beyond the usual social pressures they faced as individuals in peace time. 41,500 Jewish men served in the British Armed Forces during the war, experiencing the trauma and comradeship of modern warfare, whilst also battling the negativity of being perceived as unfit for military service.¹ On the Home Front the Jewish population experienced the same daily pressures faced by British society, including rationing, conscription and air raids, but the perception that, as a community, they were not 'doing their bit', continued to pervade the local and national press. The experiences of the war highlight the paradox of the Jewish experience, which was by no means homogenous across the community, but faced similar tensions about the nature of their relationship with Britain, whilst being a part of the war effort.

This tension was revealed throughout the years of the First World War. Increased antagonism between Jews and non-Jews in the East End of London was one such example, where a perception that Jews were profiting from the war effort whilst avoiding military service, sparked local violence. Conversely, there is also evidence that the war forged closer ties between the working class immigrant Jewish community of London and their British counterparts. If examined in isolation these experiences of the Jewish community appear to be

¹ The total number of Jewish soldiers who served in the British Armed Forces during World War One equated to 13.8 per cent of British Jewry, a proportion greater than that of the general British population which totalled only 11.5 per cent. See Geoffrey Alderman, *Modern British Jewry* (Clarendon Press, Oxford 1992) p.233

contradictory. However, as with British society, there was no homogenous British Jewish experience of the First World War, helping to explain these contradictions. A multitude of factors – including longevity of residence, cultural attachment to Britain, professional and economic situation, location, age and gender – shaped how Jewish people experienced the war. This insight demands that analysis of the Jewish experience of the First World War is sensitive to the distinctness of the Jewish narrative, whilst being aware of how demographic differences within the community affected their perception of British identity.

Considering the importance of the First World War for the later development of British Jewry, the conflict has been relatively underplayed in the historiography of the community. In the context of the 20th century, this is understandable. The Great War experiences of Anglo-Jewry have been overshadowed in public and academic consciousness since the mid-20th century by more dominant themes relating to the Holocaust, the Second World War and the creation of the state of Israel. In the case of the Second World War, this is a phenomenon that encompasses general public consciousness of 20th century conflict and is not restricted to Jewish memory. Concepts and memories of the earlier global conflict are often viewed through the prism of the latter, not just by survivors who experienced both wars, but also within contemporary media and popular portrayals of the Great War. Rationing, air raids, conscription, U-boat blockade, total war economies, and gender equality in the war industries: all are associated primarily with the 1939-1945 war, with only a dim public consciousness that these ‘revolutionary’ tenets of industrial warfare characterised the events of 20 years previously. This is true also in the context of remembrance of Anglo-Jewry’s war. The all-encompassing impact of the Second World War for the Jewish community and the fight against the evils of Nazism draws attention away from the earlier conflict in which arguably Jewish interest had a more crucial stake in the outcome. In this regard the First World War was a war of catastrophe for Jews that did not end in 1918. As Jay Winter has stated, the degeneration of warfare and society that led to the Holocaust was only possible in a European society that had been forced to

comprehend the previously unimaginable scale of 10 million war deaths in 1914-1918.²

This thesis seeks to re-examine the London Jewish experience of the First World War and demonstrate the unprecedented impact of the conflict on the development of the community. The study will show a community divided across lines of religion, nationality, and class, and the extent to which the First World War exacerbated these divisions as well as heightening tension between the Jewish community and mainstream British society. The First World War has been called a 'Supremely nationalistic war'.³ This thesis will examine the impact of the war on Jewish nationalism in the British context. It will demonstrate how active service during the war instilled a Jewish patriotism, fed by the experiences of antisemitism in the British Army, the Balfour Declaration and service in Palestine. The war deepened divisions between the established Jewish community and the more recent immigrant Jewish community and led to the serious questioning of the existence of the religious and political authority that the former claimed over the latter. By the end of the war, two distinct and independent Jewish communities can be detected. The war provided a business boom for Jewish tailors, relaxation of naturalisation laws, and for many British Jews a vindication of their status as Britons through service and sacrifice on the front line. Conversely, it saw a sharp increase in anti-Jewish violence and agitation on the Home Front, discrimination in the British Army and a crisis over Russian Jewish conscription that threatened to permanently undermine the position of the Jewish community in British society. The war must be re-examined as an important event in the historiography of British Jewry in its own right rather than as a dramatic interruption in its progress.

² Jay Winter, *The Great War and Jewish Memory*, lecture given at the Leo Baeck Institute in London. 3 July 2014

³ L.L Farrar jr. 'Nationalism in Wartime: Critiquing the Conventional Wisdom'. In Fran Coetzee and Marilyn Shevin-Coetzee (eds.), *Authority, Identity and the Social History of the Great War*. (London, 1996), p.133.

I. London Jewry: the Politics of Integration 1881-1914

This study focuses almost exclusively on the London-based demographic of British Jewry during the era of the Great War. This focus was selected primarily on the basis that London had the largest population of Jews living in Britain in this period and therefore the largest and richest source base for this particular history. The highest dependable estimates put the population of London Jewry at 180,000 in 1914, compared to a national total of 300,000.⁴ As Geoffrey Alderman has stated 'Both in numbers and in economic status the Jews of London exercised the preponderating influence in ordering the affairs of British Jewry'.⁵ The majority of the Deputies representing London communities on the *Board of Deputies of British Jews* dominated numerically and participatively on Board matters, despite attempts in the years before 1914 to extend representation and participation to provincial communities.⁶ The experiences of Jews living in other urban centres such as Leeds, Manchester and Glasgow as well as in the provinces will be used for comparative discussions, as will the conditions and treatment of Jews in the other main belligerent powers to contrast and critique the London based Jews' experience of the war. In selecting a specific urban environment for a focus on the issues of patriotism, race and split loyalties explored in this study, the importance of place and community in remembrance of the Great War can be more effectively utilised in the context of London Jewry.

This thesis will draw a clear distinction within the scope and experience of London Jewry during the First World War: between the older and more established Jewish community who maintained a strong English identity and was heavily integrated within English society, and the more recent immigrant Jewish population, whose residence in London began after 1881 and can be characterised in 1914 as still in the process of transition between the eastern European culture of their origin and the British society of their current

⁴ Alderman, *British Jewry*, pp.119-120

⁵ Ibid, p.16

⁶ Aubrey Newman, 'The Board of Deputies of British Jews, 1760 to the Present'. *Parliaments, Estates Representation*, 25:1, (2005), pp.84-85

residence. To account for the problems of the multiplicity of identity and experience within the broad categories of established and immigrant Jewries, this thesis will refer to the two communities of Jews in London as 'West End' and 'East End' Jews respectively. This may initially appear to confuse the definition further, with many 'English' born and orientated Jews residing in the East of London and, similarly, an entire and numerically dominant community of originally Eastern European Jews living in London's West End districts. However, the great majority of Russian Jews who form the focus of chapter one, lived and worked and interacted with non-Jews within a relatively small geographical area between Aldgate and Bow in London's historic East End.⁷ In comparison, by the middle of the nineteenth century, the majority of the leading families of Anglo-Jewry - notably the Rothschilds, the Montefiores and the Goldsmids - had relocated from the City to the fashionable districts of Kensington, Belgravia and Mayfair, followed in turn from the East End by the increasingly prosperous Jewish small business owners that formed the backbone of the London Jewish middle class.⁸ In discussing both the West End and East End Jewish communities in London during this period therefore, reference will be made primarily to 'established Jewry' and 'immigrant Jewry' respectively. However, whilst a local perspective to both communities' war experience in regards local and national patriotisms will be employed in this thesis, the use of 'West End' and 'East End' Jewry as shorthand terms of differentiation are employed here more significantly as a social rather than a geographical delineation between the two groups.⁹

The Jewish East End was the most prominent Jewish enclave resulting from the great diasporic waves of Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe from 1881 onwards. There had been Jewish immigration to London from Russia and Poland before this date, with a steady trickle of Eastern European Jews settling

⁷ David Englander (Ed.), *A Documentary History of Jewish Immigrants in Britain 1840 – 1920* (Leicester University Press, Leicester 1994), p.63

⁸ Alderman, *British Jewry*, pp.12-15

⁹ In this regards this mirrors the use of the terms 'West End' and 'East End' to differentiate between English and Yiddish speaking Jews in London by Sharman Kadish. See Sharman Kadish, *Bolsheviks and British Jews: The Anglo-Jewish Community, Britain and the Russian Revolution* (Frank Cass, London 1992), p.9

in the city since the 18th century.¹⁰ In 1850 the total Jewish population of Britain stood at less than 40,000, of whom approximately 18,000 were thought to reside in London.¹¹ The Jewish East End both as a term and an entity did not yet exist, however there were several thousand Jews residing between the east of the City where the bulk of London's mid-19th century Jewish population resided and the suburban environs of Stepney Green and Mile End.¹² The district of Bethnal Green that flanked Stepney had a particular concentration of Jewish migration into the neighbourhood prior to this period, a map of the area in 1850 reveals a local synagogue with an adjacent Jewish school, a 'JewsW' road and three Jewish cemeteries that marked the eastern fringe of London in the mid-19th Century.¹³

The Jewish population of London, approximately 46,000 before the 1881 pogroms, had risen to 135,000 by 1900, of which an estimated 120,000 lived in the East End.¹⁴ In an area of less than two square miles lived nine-tenths of the Jewish population of turn of the century Britain.¹⁵ Motivation for Jewish immigration from Russia was multifaceted. For some such as the parents of East London carpenter Sam Clarke, the violent anti-Jewish pogroms that followed in the wake of Tsar Alexander II's assassination in 1881 convinced

¹⁰ Todd Endelman, *The Jews of Britain 1656 to 2000* (University of California Press, London 2002), p.128

¹¹ J. A Green, *Social History of the Jewish East End in London 1914-1939* (The Edwin Mellen Press, Lampeter 1991), P.35

¹² An entry in the 'Dickens Dictionary of London 1888, an Unconventional Handbook' compiled by Charles Dickens Jr (1837-1896) lists the Jewish settlement in London as being geographically limited: 'Within the memory of living man the Jews of the metropolis were scarcely ever to be found resident outside their own quarter, at the east end of the City, embracing Bevis Marks, Aldgate, Houndsditch, the Minorities, Haydon sq... Goodman's-fields, Whitechapel. Petticote Lane (since called Middlesex-st, but dear the heart of Isreal as "the lane"), part of Spitafields &c'. See <http://www.jewishgen.org/jcr-uk/London/Dickens%20Dictionary%20of%20London%201888%20-%20section%20entitled%20Jews.pdf> p.2

¹³ <http://london1850.com/cross06.htm>

¹⁴ Alderman, *British Jewry*, pp.117-118. John Marriot puts the number of immigrants from Tsarist Russia arriving in London at 9,000 in 1881 rising to 63,000 by 1911. See John Marriot, *Beyond the Tower: a History of East London* (Yale University Press, London 2012), p.228. Marriot concedes that these numbers reflect only those Russian and Polish immigrants that had been processed entering East London between these years, and does not accurately reflect the number of immigrants who subsequently stayed. The Jewish Board of Guardians and other concerned institutions worked to have a sizable proportion of Jewish immigrants repatriated or provided passage on to the U.S.A. Marriot concludes that immigration exceeded emigration into the area by approximately twice as much.

¹⁵Englander, *History of Jewish Immigrants*, p.63

many Jews that their future safety and prosperity could no longer be assured.¹⁶ As John Klier and Jonathan Dekel-Chen have shown in recent works on anti-Jewish violence in Russia during the 19th century, state officials neither desired nor organised pogroms against Jews (although they displayed an indifference in preventing the violence), but the contemporary belief among Jewish immigrants and their descendants in state sponsored anti-Jewish violence in Russia remained powerful, and would animate responses to state authority and mob violence during the First World War.¹⁷ Despite this, most decisions to leave their homeland were motivated predominantly by the lack of economic opportunities for Jews in Imperial Russia than the direct experience of violence. The systematic repression of Jews rather than the destructive acts of organised violence was cited by the majority of Jewish migrants as the reason for their journeys when asked by the House of Lords Select Committee on the Sweating System in 1888.¹⁸

The decision to choose Britain as the destination to start a new life was also wide-ranging among migrant Jews. The established Jewish community in Britain and particularly the Russian and Polish Jewish migrants more recently settled in East London offered the prospect of familial support upon arrival and the friendly protection of wealthy English Jews sympathetic to their plight. In reality, many Russian Jews arrived in the East End bearing little more than an address for the Poor Jews' Temporary Shelter in Leman Street, and despite the philanthropic support provided by Anglo-Jewry from which the shelter itself was a product, the general sentiment of established Jews was to discourage further immigration.¹⁹ The two-week residence limit for new arrivals at the shelter on Leman Street was an indication of this. Many were drawn by the promise of civil and political liberties and economic opportunities in Britain for which Jews were disbarred under the Tsarist state and were not deterred by worrying accounts of

¹⁶ Sam Clarke, *Sam: an East End Cabinet-maker* (Inner London Education Authority, London 1979), p.12

¹⁷ John Klier, *Russians, Jews, and the Pogroms of 1881-1882* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2011) p.384, p.414. Jonathan Dekel-Chen, David Gaunt, Natan Meir and Israel Bartal (eds.), *Anti-Jewish Violence: Rethinking the Pogrom in East European History* (Indiana University Press, Bloomington 2011)

¹⁸ John Marriot, *Beyond the Tower*, p.228

¹⁹ William Fishman, *East End Jewish Radicals 1875-1914* (Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd, London 1975), p.33

the overcrowded streets and labour markets of the East End and the anger of the local populous towards Jewish immigrants hinted at in letters from already established relatives.²⁰ For many, the United States was the preferred destination,²¹ but the expense of the transatlantic journey often saw travellers split their trip with a stop in a British port, many subsequently remaining due to lack of funds for the remaining journey.²² This contributed to the transitional status of London's immigrant Jewish community, increasing the detachment to British society to which a significant number of the new arrivals did not intend to settle in long term.

Eastern European Jews arriving in Britain settled predominantly in urban areas with an already established Jewish community with a penetrable industry to support them - Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham and Glasgow all had small but vibrant Jewish contingents that provided the institutional and cultural support the new arrivals sought and burgeoning clothing industries satisfied the labour aspirations they had left Russia in search of. But it was London that the bulk of post 1881 Eastern European Jewish immigrants - perhaps as many as 70% - established themselves, and the majority settled in the Eastern part of the city.²³ Bill Belmont, born in 1910 in Old Montague Street, East London, recalled his father's and other Jewish immigrant's experience of arriving in London for the first time: 'On disembarking, the mass of Jews carrying bundles containing all their worldly possessions were taken by representatives of the London Jewish Board of Guardians, who met every ship, to the Jews' temporary shelter in Leman Street. There they waited, hoping that some friend or relative who had already established himself in London would turn up and help. My father was lucky; one of his relatives from Druja arrived who introduced him to another Jewish exile who had already started a clothing factory. Dad was taken on as a tailor.'²⁴

²⁰ *ibid*

²¹ Robert Winder, *Bloody Foreigners: the Story of Immigration to Britain* (Little, Brown, London 2004), pp.175-176 between 1881 and 1924 2,800,000 Jews emigrated from Europe to the United States. See Rhoda G Lewin, 'Stereotype and reality in the Jewish immigrant experience in Minneapolis' *Minnesota Historical Society* 46 (1979), p.259

²² Todd Endelman, *The Jews of Britain 1656 to 2000* (University of California Press, London 2002), p.128

²³ Endelman, *Jews of Britain*, p.129

²⁴ Bill Belmont in Venitia Murray, *Echoes of the East End* (Viking, London 1989), p.169

East London has long been the point of arrival for newcomers to Britain. In the late 1680s large numbers of French Huguenots sought refuge from religious persecution in the wake of the repeal of the Edicts of Nantes in 1685 that effectively made Protestantism illegal in France. Many of them found it in Spitalfields and the adjoining areas, close to but conveniently located outside the perimeters of the City of London so that they could establish a silk weaving industry free from the restrictive legislation of the City Guild.²⁵ Despite being welcomed with a warmth experienced by few refugee groups arriving in England before or since - a public subscription raised £200,000 for their plight - their skill and success as weavers quickly led to complaints from their English equivalents.²⁶ As the Huguenot community in East London dwindled in the 18th century through assimilation, resettlement elsewhere in London or repatriation to France, the ire of the local populace's economic resentment was drawn instead to the large number of Irish labourers who had settled in the area willing to take work as journeyman weavers at low wage rates that undercut English workers.²⁷ The subsequent ill feeling revealed itself in a series of anti-Irish riots through the course of the century, the summer of 1736 for example witnessing a 4,000 strong mob marching through Shoreditch and Spitalfields chanting 'down with the Irish' and attacking Irish owned houses and businesses.²⁸ As John Marriot has stated, 'at moments of particular tension the [East London] labour force turned in on itself to reveal fissures along lines of race'.²⁹

150 or so years later, anti-alien sentiment in the East End orientated around the perceived economic threat posed to non-Jews in the tailoring industry by the new arrivals.³⁰ Excluded from the civil service and other more sedentary professions in Russia, many Russian Jews acquired work in trade and commerce industries, particularly tailoring and shoemaking.³¹ Upon arrival in London the sweated trades - usually clothing industries structured around small

²⁵ Marriot, *Beyond the Tower*, p35

²⁶ Chaim Bermant, *London's East End: Point of Arrival* (Macmillan Publishing Co, London 1975), p.31

²⁷ Marriot, *Beyond the Tower*, p.80

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid

³⁰ William J. Fishman, *East End 1888* (Five Leaves Publications, Nottingham 1988), pp.80-81

³¹ Marriot, *Beyond the Tower*, p.229

workshops employing cheap and plentiful low skilled labourers - provided the only means of employment for many immigrant Jews, swallowing up as many as 70% of new migrants. The majority found residence in the crowded streets of Whitechapel in which a high proportion of the workshops were situated.³² Employment in these workshops were characterised by dismal working conditions, long hours and low pay - attracting concern and condemnation from social and public health reformers, but also resentment among union officials and local anti-alien agitators that immigrant labour was flooding the labour market, undercutting English workers and producing poor quality goods.³³ Walter Southgate, born in 1891 in Bethnal Green and whose father was an English cabinet maker, recalled 'they [Eastern European Jews] had invaded the East End as had other races in the past and were exploited by their compatriots, cheapening their labour products to the detriment of the East End English cabinet makers. As employers of labour they were ready to exploit this new penniless immigrant labour which the government did little to control'.³⁴ Southgate was incorrect in implying 'sweating' was an exclusively Jewish problem, as the practice was widespread within the largely deregulated East London industries associated with the practice, however his hostile sentiment was a fairly typical and historic response within an East London working class facing a perceived economic threat from an immigrant community.³⁵

Anne Kershen in her 2007 article 'The Construction of Home in an Imagined Landscape', shows how three successive immigrant communities in the East End - the Huguenots in the 17th century, Russian Jews in the 19th and early 20th centuries and the later Bangladeshi community in the 1970s onwards - constructed imagined versions of the lost homeland in their new residence in the East End base on the three cornerstones of language, diet and religion.³⁶ By 1914 Whitechapel alone boasted four daily Yiddish newspapers. As Julia Bush has stated 'Despite dialect variations which reflected divisions of culture and nationality among the Jewish East Enders, Yiddish was a unifying factor

³² Ibid

³³ Endelman *The Jews of Britain*, pp.134-135

³⁴ Walter Southgate, *That's The Way It Is. A Working Class Autobiography 1890-1950* (New Clarion Press, Oxted 1982), p33

³⁵ Marriot, *Beyond the Tower*, p.225; p.80

³⁶ Anne J. Kershen, 'The Construction of Home in a Spitalfields Landscape', *Landscape Research*, 29:3, (2004) pp.261-275

because it was universally understood'.³⁷ Yiddish language musical comedies, melodramas and operettas were regular features of the halls and clubs across the East End, the most famous being the Pavilion Theatre on Whitechapel Road.³⁸ There were 35 synagogues in East London by 1914, providing an integral community network that provided not only the daily support and religious needs of their congregations but the perpetuation of Judaism and knowledge of Hebrew through religious education.³⁹ And the 126 kosher poulterers in Spitalfields alone attest to the perseverance of the staple chicken loksun soup, a transferred recipe from the Shetl.⁴⁰ This transfer of culture allowed for an imagined construction of the lost homeland to be created within the alien and hostile environment of East London in which a collective identity could be continued, albeit one which could be attacked for creating isolation from the host society.⁴¹ However, this was far from a crystallised process - as Kershen shows the reimagined homeland was continually shaped by the forces of assimilation, and this was most evident in the school rooms and playing yards of East London schools. Only 20% of immigrant Jewish children attended Jewish schools, the rest attending nondenominational state-supported schools where they interacted and socialised with English children and were introduced to the language, customs, literature and traditions of English culture.⁴² Sam Clarke, born in Bethnal Green in 1907 several years after his parents emigrated from Russia, recalled his school experiences: 'I went to Teesdale St. School in Hackney Rd... Almost a third of the boys in my class were Jewish, apart from an occasional fair fist-fight between two boys we were friendly to each other.'⁴³

The Jewish East End was not a homogenous community but one containing many divergent national backgrounds, experiences, levels of religious observance, stages of British integration and aspirations. There was, as Anne Kershen has noted, a number of 'intellectual, social and communal divisions that existed within the Eastern European immigrant community' which

³⁷ Bush, *East London Jews War*, p.147

³⁸ Endelman, *Jews of Britain*, p149

³⁹ Bush, *East London Jews War*, p.147

⁴⁰ Kershen, 'Construction of Home', p.267

⁴¹ Marriot, *Beyond the Tower*, p231

⁴² Endelman, *Jews of Britain*, p149

⁴³ Sam Clarke *Sam: an East End Cabinet-maker* (Inner London Education Authority, London 1979), p.12

problematise attempts to characterise the Jewish East End acting with one aim.⁴⁴ This study will focus primarily on the Russian Jewish community post 1881 but many non-Russian Jews lived in and characterised the Jewish East End of this era. Within this community, a further generational distinction can be drawn. The first generation of mostly Russian Jewish immigrants displayed indifference - bordering on hostility - towards both the prospect of further acculturation within British society and Britain's war cause. Yiddish was widely spoken throughout the Jewish East End, particularly by first generation immigrants, and was a prominent barrier to social interaction with non-Jewish residents. The majority of these Jews adopted an immigrant perspective of their adopted home, retaining the language and culture of the shtetl and conscious and mutually desirous segregation from their English neighbours.

The identity and aspirations of the second generation of this community is more ambiguous. Born and schooled in Britain (although not necessarily naturalised citizens, as the process of naturalisation was expensive and time-consuming) and with a greater grasp of English and the finer nuances of British society, this younger generation were also heavily influenced by the cultural customs and expectations of the elder generation. This younger generation of immigrant Jews in the East End - the majority of who were of military age by the later stages of the war - would become the subject of intense national pressure and local hostility during the conscription crisis of 1917. Overall, Jews of Russian origin in the East End of London were largely indifferent to concepts of British patriotism and displayed hostility towards attempts to mobilise them into Britain's war effort. Whilst the fifteen years or so before the outbreak of the Great War saw a gradual process of acculturation within the Jewish East End, the community in 1914 could still be broadly characterised as a community in transition. However, as the thesis will demonstrate, the processes of the war and in particular the effects of serving in the British Army within the Jewish Battalions, created a sense of Britishness, albeit with numerous conditions, that did not exist before 1914. Both aspects of the London Jewish war experience were tied together in part by English hostility. The Jewish Battalion scheme

⁴⁴Anne Kershen, *Trade unionism amongst the Jewish tailoring workers of London 1872-1915* (London Museum of Jewish Life, London 1988), p.6

brought together these experiences and nurtured both a new British patriotism or refocused connection to Britain whilst paradoxically instilling a renewed Jewish nationalism through involvement in Zionist activities.

I have eschewed for the most part using the terms integrated or assimilated for describing London's West End Jewish community, as this would give the impression that all West London Jews had supplanted a Jewish identity for a notional religious one and this was not universally the case. The employment of the term 'established Jewry' and 'West End Jewry' are used here to describe English Jews, belonging predominantly to the upper and middle classes of Edwardian Britain's stratified society. As already noted, the majority of English Jews in London resided predominantly, albeit far from exclusively, in the central western districts of the metropolis. Again, the majority though certainly not the entirety, of these Jewish 'West Enders', considered themselves to be English in nationality and culture, and were bound together by a loose local communal patriotism centring in part on the activities and influence of the West London Synagogue and the larger United Synagogue, despite the ecclesiastical divide between the two congregations.⁴⁵ The separation between the Liberal Judaism of the *West London Synagogue* and the continued orthodoxy of the *United Synagogue* was a point of division within the communal life of Jewish West Londoners in the years before 1914, but as Alderman has stated there was a 'remarkable similarity in social class between the membership of the West London congregation and that of the larger United synagogues, coupled with the high degree of social and professional contact between the lay and ecclesiastical leaderships of both'.⁴⁶ The majority of this 'West End' Jewish community overwhelmingly felt themselves to be English, and engaged in the war effort with unqualified patriotism. However, the repeated controversies during the war that placed emphasis on their status as Jews rather than Englishmen and women, to an extent diminished this patriotism.

⁴⁵ Alderman, *British Jewry*, pp.200-205.

⁴⁶ *Ibid* p.204

The Jewish East End can be more easily identified geographically and demographically than its West End equivalent. The high proportion of Jewish residents of the various East End districts, their relatively recent arrival, and their distinctive difference in appearance and culture from the surrounding indigenous population allows a more accurate if problematic delineation of a distinct community, defined primarily by its Eastern European customs and continued orthodoxy. Established Jewry could be defined less readily – by key individuals, prominent families and powerful institutions rather than geographical boundaries and cultural stereotypes. Political and financial leadership within London's Jewish community had passed from the Sephardi to the German immigrant element in the early to mid-nineteenth century - a process perhaps best demonstrated by the success of the bonds trading company N M Rothschild & Sons. The Rothschild family and a small group of other prominent Anglo-Jewish families exerted a powerful influence over this Jewish community based loosely around the West End districts of Mayfair, Bloomsbury and Belgravia.⁴⁷ These families were far from atypical of course. The majority of anglicised Jews in London were middle class, involved in sedentary professions⁴⁸ and whose attire and demeanour was akin to the rest of middle-England.⁴⁹ In contrast, the majority of Jews living or working in the West End of London at this time were low-paid immigrant workers, indistinct from their East End equivalents other than their local attachments to street and kin. As Gerry Black in his history of the Jewish West End stated 'Nowhere else covers such a wide diversity of nationalities, wealth and poverty, poor housing and mansions. Other areas may claim one or more attributes but only the West End has them all. Established wealthy families lived close by the majority of immigrant workers... At the end of the 19th century Montefiores, Rothschilds and Mocattas lived around the corner from the tailors and small traders of Soho and Fitzrovia'.⁵⁰ The term 'West End Jewry' is therefore a somewhat inadequate catch-all term, but for the purposes of this thesis it will refer exclusively to the 'Montefiores, Rothschilds and Mocattas' and the bulk of the

⁴⁷ See Stephen Brooks, *The Club: Jews of Modern Britain*. (Constable, London 1998)

⁴⁸ Joseph Jacobs, *Studies in Jewish Statistics, Social, Vital and Anthropometric* (D.Nutt, London 1891)

⁴⁹ Johnson, *Pogroms, Peasants, Jews*, p.207

⁵⁰ Gerry Black, *Living Up West: Jewish Life in London's West End* (The London Museum of Jewish Life, London 1994), p.4

acculturated Jewish middle classes, rather than the 'tailors and small traders of Soho and Fitzrovia'.

There were a number of openly orthodox West End Jews, whose Jewishness was absolutely public and visible. Prominent examples in this period include Samuel Montagu, 1st Baron Swaythling and Liberal MP for Whitechapel between 1885 and 1900. However, for many of these bourgeois and elite Jews, Jewish practice was largely transferred to the private sphere.⁵¹ As Sam Johnson has argued 'in terms of Anglo-Jewish ambition, the greatest achievement was to be wholly unrecognisable as a Jew'.⁵² Johnson perhaps exaggerates the process of Jewish acculturation in this period here, yet David Feldman has demonstrated that Jewish achievement of civil liberties in 1858 led to greater pressure on Jews 'not only to justify the persistence of Judaism within a Christian society but also to show themselves worthy of inclusion within the nation'.⁵³ Attempts within Anglo-Jewry to reform Judaism and reduce cultural ties to the level of other Protestant denominations was one result of this, as was a parallel conscious attempt to reduce differentiation and integrate successfully into the nation, made more pressing by the collectivism promoted both by the ideology of New Liberalism and Conservative Imperialism. Chaim Lewis, a Jewish resident of Soho at the beginning of the twentieth century, recalled: 'Many of the Jews who came into the West End began to show early signs of assimilation. They no longer observed the Sabbath. Well, it happened in the East End too, but because they had greater numbers there was always a stronger reservoir of orthodox Jews who adhered to the strict tenets of Judaism. Whereas in the West End you saw the loosening of religious ties even among the newly arrived immigrants'.⁵⁴ The Central Synagogue on Great Portland Street was renowned for its anglicised congregation. Chaim Lewis recalled 'My father used to call them the *Englischer Yehudim*, the English Jews'.⁵⁵ The indistinctive features of the integrated Jewish community in early 20th century

⁵¹ David Feldman, 'Jews in London, 1880-1914', in Raphael Samuel (Ed.), *Patriotism: The Making and Unmaking of British National Identity* Vol 2. (Routledge, London 1989), pp.207-29

⁵² Johnson, *Pogroms, Peasants, Jews*, p.207

⁵³ Feldman, *Jews in London*, pp.207-29

⁵⁴ Chaim Lewis, *A Soho Address. [an Autobiography]* (Victor Gollancz, London 1965)

⁵⁵ Ibid, for more differences between West and East End immigrant Jews see Black, *Living Up West*, pp.23-26

London were in fact a point of distinction, and the product of a nuanced but concerted process of 'De-emphasising foreignness' within London Jewry.⁵⁶

The acceleration of Jewish immigration into Britain from Russia and Tsarist-controlled lands after 1881 threatened to reverse this process. As a result the established London Jewish community created and shaped social institutions such as the Jewish Board of Guardians, the Jews' Free School, and the Jews Temporary Shelter, as well as the *Board of Deputies of British Jews* 'through which to introduce to poor and alien Jews the values of the English middle class'.⁵⁷ The *Anglo-Jewish Association* and other philanthropic institutions were active in nurturing the new arrivals on humanitarian grounds but anxiety remained within Anglo-Jewry regarding British concerns covering such issues as poverty, crime and degeneration, and the belief of British public opinion that it was Anglo-Jewry's responsibility to police the immigrant population.⁵⁸ Harder-edged attempts to dominate the religious, economic and political leadership of the new arrivals included attempts to absorb immigrant congregations in the East End under the authority and model of the *United Synagogue*, the union of British orthodox Jewish synagogues that formed the dominant force in religious and communal organization within British Jewry.⁵⁹ Politically, the BoD and the AJA spoke (and spoke often) on behalf of all Jews residing in Britain, and the *Jewish Chronicle* competed with Yiddish papers to become the organ of the 'East End' as well as the 'West End' of London Jewry.⁶⁰

Attempts to anglicise, reform and influence the new arrivals also took the form of initiatives such as the formation of Jewish youth movements in the East End. One example of this was the establishment of the Jewish Lads Brigade, which attempted to instil supposed British virtues of modesty and military discipline in immigrant youth.⁶¹ Established in 1895 by the vice chairman of the influential

⁵⁶ Susan Tananbaum, *Jewish Immigrants in London, 1880-1939* (Pickering & Chatto, London 2014), p.24

⁵⁷ Juliet Steyn, *The Jew: Assumptions of Identity* (Cassel, London 1999), p.75

⁵⁸ Yael Granot-Bein, 'An Urgent Social Problem? Jewish Juvenile Delinquents in Turn-of-Twentieth-Century London', *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies*, 9 (2010) p.369

⁵⁹ See Ann Kershen, & Jonathan Romain, *Tradition and Change. A history of Reform Judaism in Britain* (Valentine Mitchell, London 1995)

⁶⁰ See David Cesarani, *The Jewish Chronicle and Anglo-Jewry 1841-1991* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1994)

⁶¹ See Sharman Kadish, *A Good Jew and a Good Englishman: the Jewish Lads' & Girls' Brigades 1895-1995* (Valentine Mitchell, London 1995)

Anglo-Jewish Gentleman's club the Maccabeans, the brigade aimed to 'Cultivate the sound spirit in the sound body which marked the well trained soldier... and to spread amongst Jewish working lads the habits of smartness and obedience, while augmenting their growth and general vigour'.⁶² Members of the JLB would account for 27% of Jewish deaths in the British Army during the war (525 of 1,949).⁶³ The Brigade went some way to altering the negative image of the Jew as soldier in both Jewish and non-Jewish perceptions, but its popularity amongst East London Immigrants remained low in the years before the war due to the legacy of the brutal treatment of Jews under military conscription in the Tsarist Empire. Girls were only belatedly inducted into the Brigade in the late 1950s and 1960s to form The Jewish Lads and Girls' Brigade. However a similar youth club, The Jewish Girls' Club preceded the JLB, forming in 1886, and provided the inspiration for the formation of a male equivalent.⁶⁴

The dominant motivation behind these Anglo-Jewish initiatives was the fear that the continuing 'foreignness' of immigrant Jews threatened to 'Drag it [Anglo-Jewry] down in a wave of popular anti-Semitic resentment'.⁶⁵ The increased size of the Jewish community in Britain – 65,000 in 1881 to nearly 300,000 by 1914 – coincided with a period of deep reflection and anxiety concerning the state of the nation amongst certain circles of British intellectuals and nationalists.⁶⁶ British society had purportedly entered a general malaise induced by debilitating conditions for the working classes, Imperial overstretch and, fundamentally in many nationalist perceptions, the creeping calamity of the 'encroaching alien hordes'.⁶⁷ The agitations of anti-alien campaigners such as Arnold White, who sought to 'eliminate aliens whose living and work habits

⁶² Colonel Goldsmith quoted in the *JC*, 22 February 1895, cited from: Kadish, *A Good Jew and Good Englishman* p.12.

⁶³ *ibid* p.2

⁶⁴ "But What about the Boys?" *JC*, April 1891. See also Kadish, *A Good Jew and Good Englishman* p.2

⁶⁵ Mark Levene, *War, Jews, and the New Europe: The diplomacy of Lucien Wolf 1914-1919*. (Oxford University Press, Oxford 1992), p.9

⁶⁶ *ibid*

⁶⁷ 'The Alien Immigrant' *Blackwood's Magazine*, 173 (January 1903), pp.132-41. Cited from Tananbaum, *Jewish Immigrants in London*, p.23

undermined the health and welfare of the nation', led inexorably to the Aliens Act of 1905 that greatly restricted the further entry of 'undesirable' immigrants.⁶⁸

Despite Colin Holmes' famous statement that 'at no point between 1876 and 1914 did any [government] introduce discriminatory legislation specifically against Jews',⁶⁹ the groundswell of low-level agitation headed by the likes of Arnold White that led indirectly to the Act were anti-Jewish in nature, and as Lara Trubowitz has argued, many of the parliamentarians involved in its passing were guilty of 'Civil' antisemitism.⁷⁰ Among the front ranks of anti-alien campaigners calling for tougher legislation against immigration was the Conservative MP for Stepney Major William Evans-Gordon. After a successful military and diplomatic career in British India, Evans-Gordon was elected MP for Stepney on an anti-alien platform in the 1900 general election. Stepney, as will be discussed in more detail in chapter one, was a hotbed of anti-alien sentiment as a result of high immigration into a historically poor London constituency. Evans-Gordon used his position as an East End MP to promote and strengthen the local connections of his personal project, the anti-alien group the British Brothers' League.⁷¹ Despite attempts by Evans-Gordon and other high ranking members to present the League as anti-immigrant rather than specifically antisemitic in intent, Jews were highly prominent amongst the immigrant communities targeted by the group, and many of the BBL's larger meetings were characterised by anti-Jewish rants by affiliated speakers.⁷² Established Jewry challenged the excesses of anti-alienism and exposed the exaggeration in certain arguments: the MP Stuart Samuel pointed out that only 1,753 aliens depended on Government assistance in 1903, a fraction of the

⁶⁸ For specifics on what defined an 'undesirable immigrant', see reprint of the Aliens Act 1905 in Englander, *History of Jewish Immigrants*, pp.278-281. For analysis see David Glover, *Literature, Immigration, and Diaspora in Fin-de-Siècle England: A Cultural History of the 1905 Aliens Act* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2012)

⁶⁹ Colin Holmes, *Anti-Semitism in British Society 1876-1939* (Edward Arnold, London 1979) p.89

⁷⁰ Lara Trubowitz, 'Acting Like an Alien: 'Civil' Anti-Semitism, the Rhetoricised Jew, and Early Twentieth-Century British Immigration Law'. In Etain Bar-Yosuf & Nadia Valman, *The Jew' in Late-Victorian and Edwardian Culture: Between the East End and East Africa* (Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke 2009), p.65

⁷¹ Glover, *Cultural History of the 1905 Aliens Act*, p.58

⁷² Robert Benewick, *Political Violence and Public Order* (Allan Lane, London 1969), pp. 25-26

number quoted by White.⁷³ The *Jewish Chronicle* vigorously opposed the bill, consistently attempting to expose anti-alien sentiment as thinly disguised antisemitism, warning in 1904: 'We cannot believe that the Home Secretary has seriously considered the danger of generating such dangerous distinctions in the popular mind, and of creating the beginnings of an anti-Jewish sentiment under government patronage'.⁷⁴ In the context of the later Aliens Acts of 1914 and 1919, the Act of 1905 did not drastically limit the possibility of immigration into Britain - instead, as Colin Holmes has put it, the historic tradition of free entry for aliens into Britain was now a 'discretionary, rather than an absolute right'.⁷⁵ However, the 1905 Act served as a psychological and symbolic deterrent to further immigration, and immigration into Britain from Tsarist Russia fell from more than 12,000 in 1906 to less than 4,000 by 1911.⁷⁶ The Act may not have been outwardly prejudiced towards Jewish immigrants, but as John Garrard has pointed out, it was less important whether the Aliens Act was antisemitic in intent than that the public thought it might be.⁷⁷

The Act also greatly increased the anxiety of communal leaders regarding the damage to the reputation of the community and resulted in increased intervention into the functioning of the Jewish East End to further root out the 'foreignness' of the immigrant Jew.⁷⁸ To quote the historian William Fishman, this can be summarised as a plea to immigrant Jews to 'Eschew your Yiddish language and culture. Adopt the English language with its civilising customs'.⁷⁹ These attempts at control were increasingly frustrated in the years immediately preceding 1914 by the growth of Jewish trade unionism, political movements and the vigorous defence of congregational integrity. The growing confidence and security of Russian Jewish political institutions and the increasing prosperity of the tailoring trade provides evidence that two autonomous camps

⁷³ PRO HO 45, 10303/117267/9779, 'Notes of Deputation from the Jewish Board of Deputies on the Aliens Bill,' 19 May 1904. Cited from Tananbaum, *Jewish Immigrants in London*, p.25

⁷⁴ *JC*, 8 April 1904

⁷⁵ Colin Holmes, 'Public Opinion in England and the Jews 1914-1918, *Michael: On the History of the Jews in the Diaspora*, Tel Aviv University, 1986 p.97

⁷⁶ Alderman, *British Jewry*, p.150

⁷⁷ John Garrard, *The English and Immigration 1880-1910* (Oxford University Press, Oxford 1971), p.57

⁷⁸ Tananbaum, *Jewish Immigrants in London*, p.24

⁷⁹ Fishman, *East End Jewish Radicals*, p.188

within British Jewry had been formed before the outbreak of the war. By 1914, established Jewry's interventions in the Jewish East End were 'increasingly defensive and, at moments, desperate'.⁸⁰

II. The First World War in British Jewish Memory

To mark the centenary of the First World War in 2014, the Jewish Museum of London put on a major exhibition: *For King and Country? The Jewish Experience of the First World War*. Running from March to August 2014, the exhibition demonstrated the multifaceted impact the war had on the Jewish community and Jewish individuals, set to a background narrative of a Jewish community experiencing acute social and demographic pressures to 'fit in' with British expectations of their perceived role in the nation. As the curator of the exhibition Roz Currie said in a talk at the Leo Baeck Institute in April 2014, the exhibition concerns directly Jewish 'motivations for service' in the British Armed forces, particularly its split loyalties.⁸¹

The exhibition marked the first large-scale representation of the Jewish experience of the Great War in the museum's eighty-three year history, dovetailing neatly with the public's heightened interest in everything World War One in the centenary year. Many of the props and show piece exhibits were lifted from the lesser known Jewish Military Museum in Hendon, and little attempt was made to utilise the incredibly rich and varying source material in the collections at the Imperial War Museum or the National Archives at Kew relating to Jewish life and the war. There was an overemphasis on the contemporary experience of 1914-1918 for the 'Jewish voices' on display, but little focus on how the war exacerbated pre-war conditions, or significance accorded to the legacy of the war for the Jewish community, an absence of emphasis true also within British Jewish studies as a whole. However, the

⁸⁰ Feldman, *Englishmen and Jews*, p.300

⁸¹ Roz Currie, 'Curating the Jewish WW1' lecture given at the Leo Baeck Institute for the study of the History and Culture of German-Speaking Jewry. 2nd April 2014

exhibition succeeded in providing a public narrative of Anglo-Jewry's Great War experience that simply did not previously exist. Public consciousness on the subject of Jews, war and antisemitism were restricted in the main to discourses on the interwar struggles with fascist groups and the impact of the Second World War.

This re-examination of the war from an Anglo-Jewish perspective and the broader connection of British society and Empire to the First World War coincided with an increased media scrutiny on Jewish life in Britain, centring on the intensity and nature of 21st Century antisemitism. In the summer of 2014 newspapers reported on 'the rising tide of anti-Semitism in Britain' connected to the recent Gaza conflict.⁸² Since the Gaza violence British antisemitism has continued to rise - the Metropolitan Police revealed the number of antisemitic crimes in London rose 61% between November 2014 and November 2015 compared to the same period the previous year, and on 2 April 2016 a group of far right protesters held an anti-Jewish demonstration in front of a war memorial in Golders Green.⁸³ Remembering the Jewish experience of the Great War – with Jews attacked and abused on the streets of London within the context of a wider conflict – is therefore directly relevant today. The war presented many flash points of high tension between Jews and non-Jews. A particularly nasty anti-Jewish incident occurred in September 1917 in Bethnal Green; Jewish businesses were looted and vandalised, and hundreds of immigrant Jews subjected to violent attacks in the streets. In determining the motivation driving the English crowd to violence against their Jewish neighbours, documentary analysis has uncovered several key determinants. Anger at a perceived non-commitment on behalf of the Jewish community to Britain's war cause; war-strain and shortages on the Home Front; economic xenophobia resulting from Jewish encroachment in traditionally English industries such as tailoring and cabinet making. In truth all three factors – their perception as much as reality – blended together to create the conditions for local fury to pour forth. Local

⁸² <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2707421/Rising-tide-anti-semitism-Britain-Jewish-people-face-backlash-bloodshed-Gaza.html>

⁸³For Commentary on the rise of contemporary London antisemitism see <http://www.jewishnews.co.uk/met-police-figures-show-61-percent-increase-in-anti-semitic-crime/> For the Golders Green incident see <https://cst.org.uk/news/blog/2016/04/02/far-right-demonstrators-at-golders-green-war-memorial>. see https://cst.org.uk/data/file/1/9/Incidents_Report_2015.1454417905.pdf

memory mythologised how English tailors serving in the war were muscled out of their territory by entrepreneurial Jews 'shirking' their responsibilities, making quick bucks whilst East London families starved.⁸⁴

The memory of Bethnal Green in 1917 has been invoked many times since, particularly in the struggles with fascist groups in the periods before and after the Second World War. It remains a relevant issue in 21st century London, with violent attacks on London synagogues and Jewish individuals spiking during the 2014 conflict in Gaza and fuelling high levels of antisemitic crime in Britain in the subsequent years.⁸⁵ Again, a war situation is seen to degrade Jewish and non-Jewish relations in Britain, despite the comparatively small number of incidents involved. With the centenary celebrations in 2014, World War One studies have gained a greater public prominence with the British public that will culminate in the centenary of the Armistice on 11 November 2018 (with a postscript in July 2019 to mark the centenary of the Versailles peace conference). During this prolonged period of commemoration and reflection, how much of Britain's public and media-driven remembrance should be focused on unpalatable aspects of Britain's war, in particular its treatment of minority groups during periods of intense war strain? In remembering the First World War, how much significance should historians of Anglo-Jewry attach to events such as Bethnal Green in 1917, as relevant or even central to an understanding of the Jewish war experience in London?⁸⁶ It is striking for instance, that no mention of the disturbances in Bethnal Green appear in the Jewish Museum's *King and Country* exhibition.

The focus and debates within Anglo-Jewish history have changed fundamentally in the past fifty years or so. When Cecil Roth, in his 1964 work *The History of Jews in England*, spoke of Jewish immigrants arriving in

⁸⁴ Cited from Christopher Smith, review of *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition*, (review no. 1558)

<http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/review/1558>

⁸⁵ The Jewish charity *Community Security Trust* revealed its figures indicating incidents of antisemitism across Britain fell in 2015, from 1,179 antisemitic incidents in 2014 to 924 in 2015. However, the 2015 figures were the highest the CST had recorded during a year without a trigger event such as the war in Gaza in 2014. The previous highest year without such an event was in 2011, with 609 antisemitic incidents. For the full CST report

⁸⁶ This is the subject of an article in *The Jewish Daily Forward* by Liam Hoare published 22nd August 2014 entitled 'In WWI, Jews Fought for Britain. So Why Didn't Britain Fight for Jews?' <http://forward.com/articles/204460/in-wwi-jews-fought-for-britain-so-why-didnt-britain/>

Edwardian England being greeted with 'a measure of freedom which has been the case in scarcely any other [nation]'⁸⁷, he was affirming an entrenched tradition of viewing Anglo-Jewish history as a success story to be held up proudly against the continental Jewish communities' experience of persecution and pogroms. This narrative of 'success' was first constructed near the end of the 19th century, with the holding of the first Anglo-Jewish Historical Exhibition in 1887 and the creation of the Jewish Historical Society of England in 1893, established as part of a drive to take Anglo-Jewish history more seriously by members of the Jewish elite (Lucien Wolf, Joseph Jacobs, Israel Abrahams and others) and the urgings of the *Jewish Chronicle*.⁸⁸ Although many of the themes discussed were similar to those picked out by later historians – that Anglo-Jewish history was interesting and worth studying and that the study of it illuminated English history – the historians associated with the JHSE embraced the notion that their writing ought to serve the interests of the Jewish community.⁸⁹ Hence, the achievements of the community and the liberalism of the adopted land were accentuated over the negatives such as the poverty of the immigrant Jewish communities and the anti-Jewish nature of the anti-alien laws, for example. However the American scholar Lloyd Gartner's 1960 study *The Jewish Immigrant in England 1870-1914* ushered in a period of renewed professional interest in Anglo-Jewish history that explored themes the JHSE have in the past found unpalatable.⁹⁰ This included a renewed interest in the effects of immigration, urbanisation, gender issues and most overtly, discussing the existence and prevalence of antisemitism in British society.⁹¹

Luminaries of this 'new school' within British Jewish studies such as Tony Kushner (1989), David Cesarani (1990), and Mark Levene (1992) continued to question the 'myth of English exceptionalism' from Jewish prejudice.⁹² However

⁸⁷ Cecil Roth, *A History of the Jews of England*. (Clarendon Press, Oxford 1964), p.270

⁸⁸ For a good description of the early organisation of Anglo-Jewish history see Mitchell B Hart, 'The Unbearable Lightness of Britain: Anglo-Jewish Historiography and the Anxiety of Success.' *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 6 (2007), pp.145-165

⁸⁹ Ibid, p.154

⁹⁰ Lloyd Gartner, *The Jewish Immigrant in England 1870-1914*. (Vallentine Mitchell, London 2001)

⁹¹ David Cesarani, *The Making of Modern Anglo-Jewry*. (Basil Blackwell Ltd, Oxford 1990)

⁹² Tony Kushner, *The Persistence of Prejudice : Antisemitism in British Society During the Second World War* (Manchester University Press, Manchester 1989); David Cesarani, *The*

William Rubinstein (1996) challenged what he saw as the 'systematic exaggeration of both the volume and significance of modern anti-Semitism' in their works combined with a 'equally notable insensitivity to philosemitism', and characterised the group as 'the school of the Jew as a victim, an interpretation obviously central to understanding the history of the Jews in Germany or Russia, but almost entirely irrelevant to the Jewish experience in Britain'.⁹³ Rubinstein has also argued antisemitism was 'virtually unknown' in Britain before the First World War.⁹⁴ This is a gross understatement of British antisemitism on Rubinstein's part, but does reveal the problematic nature of identifying and interpreting acts of antisemitism in the British case that differ in tone and violence, if not scale, from continental comparisons. Specific cases of violent antisemitic activity were quite rare, and those who outwardly campaigned against Jews were generally marginalised within British society and culture.⁹⁵ Instead, Kushner (2013) largely abandons the term 'antisemitism' as too limiting and provocative, preferring the concept of British ambivalence – 'supporting some Jews or their alleged activities and opposing others' – and emphasising intolerance to difference in English society.⁹⁶ English Jews were in effect given the choice of shedding their Jewishness or face being shunned, ridiculed and lampooned by the English establishment many of the Jewish elite believed themselves to belong to; a type of 'Garden party' antisemitism, as Todd Endelman (2002) refers to it.⁹⁷ Concurrently, English Jews were driven to appear unimpeachably English, a loss of Jewishness, or what makes Jewish cultural identity, that has been attacked by David Cesarani among others as 'unnatural'.⁹⁸

Making of Modern Anglo-Jewry (Blackwell, Oxford 1990); Mark Levene, *War, Jews, and the New Europe*

⁹³ William D Rubinstein, *A History of the Jews in the English-Speaking World: Great Britain*. (Macmillan Press Ltd, London 1996), p.32

⁹⁴ Ibid, p.34

⁹⁵ Tony Kushner. 'Anti-Semitism in Britain: Continuity and the absence of a resurgence?' *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 36 (2013), p.441

⁹⁶ Tony Kushner, 'Remembering to Forget: Racism and Anti-Racism in Post War Britain'. In Bryan Cheyette and Laura Marcus, (eds.), *Modernity, Culture and "The Jew"*, (Polity Press, Cambridge 1998)

⁹⁷ Todd Endelman, *Jews Of Britain 1656-2000*, (University of California Press, Berkley 2002), p.262

⁹⁸ David Cesarani, 'Dual Heritage or Dual Heritages' in, Tony Kushner (ed.). *The Jewish Heritage in British History*. (Frank Cass, London 1992), p.37

The theme of national identity and to what extent Jewishness and Englishness were interconnected has been re-examined in this context, most directly by David Feldman in his 1994 work *Englishmen and Jews* in which he argues that many of the key developments in late Victorian and Edwardian British society, such as the growth of the collectivist state and the politicisation of the working class, can be better understood through a close examination of the Jewish minority and vice versa.⁹⁹ Examination of these themes of national identity and patriotism, immigration and urbanisation, is essential in order to comprehend the Jewish community's experiences during the First World War and are central to this thesis. The patchy record of voluntary enlistment into the armed forces from the predominantly immigrant population of the Jewish East End must be set against the enthusiasm for the war effort of the upper and middle classes of Anglo-Jewry, the *Jewish Chronicle* and the Jewish elders. Does the respective enthusiasm and apathy of the integrated and immigrant Jewish communities for Britain's war cause reveal an acceptance on one hand and a rejection on the other of the necessity to anglicise by the British state; a more subtle but no less destructive form of anti-Jewish prejudice than that seen in Germany or Russia?

The themes and controversies within Anglo-Jewish historiography already discussed – simplistically, whether Anglo-Jewry can be ascribed a success or a failure – can be mapped directly onto a discussion of the historiography of the Anglo-Jewish experience of the First World War. In the traditional interpretation, the war represented a positive trial of strength for London Jewry that the community passed with flying colours. 41,500 serving Jewish troops represented an irrefutable and highly visible British patriotism and contribution to the war effort, whilst the wartime boost to political Zionism that culminated in the Balfour Declaration of 1917 saw British Zionists walking unobstructed down the corridors of power in Whitehall for the first time.

In this discourse, Jews and non-Jews worked side by side in the trenches, the factories and the halls of Westminster to deliver victory for a Liberally-minded and tolerant Britain, where incidents of friction such as the Bethnal Green riot of

⁹⁹ David Feldman, *Englishmen and Jews: Social Relations and Political Culture 1840-1914*. (Yale University Press, London 1994), p.388

September 1917 were isolated and rare, the result of localised regional considerations that did not illuminate the true conditions of tolerance and co-existence between Britain and her minority groups. This is the perspective pushed at the end of the war by the Reverend Michael Adler in his valedictory and triumphalist history of the Jewish war effort, the *British Jewry Book of Honour* in 1922, and became the bedrock on which Cecil Roth and his acolytes promulgated the benign Jewish war experience in the mid twentieth century, supported with revisions by historians such as Rubinstein near the century's close.¹⁰⁰ Rubinstein himself states that 'It can be persuasively argued that no event in modern British history so positively affected the acculturation of British Jewry in a brief period of time as did the First World War'.¹⁰¹

This happy consensus did not sit well with the 'new school', most prominently David Cesarani, who interpreted the war as a negative episode that 'engendered a serious deterioration in the position of the Jews in British society'.¹⁰² Geoffrey Alderman in his history *British Jewry since Emancipation* (originally published in 1992 as *Modern British Jewry* but revised and updated in 2014) has also stated that 'The outbreak of war in 1914 led to a sharp deterioration in the social position of Jews, and especially Jewish aliens, in Britain.'¹⁰³ English Jews, belonging to a community stretching back to the admittance of a Jewish colony under Cromwell in 1656, participated in a struggle that was defined by issues of marginalised national identity, questioned

¹⁰⁰Michael Adler, *British Jewry Book of Honour* (Caxton, London 1922). Roth, *Jews in England* In particular see the Epilogue: 'The alembic of English tolerance has operated by now on the newer arrivals as well. Their sons have taken part in English life, contributed to English achievement, striven for the England's betterment, shed their blood in England's wars. In this happy land they have attained a measure of freedom (and thereby collaboration) which has been the case in scarcely any other. That this has been possible is due in no slight measure to the process of Anglo-Jewish history—a gradual acceptance based on common sense rather than on doctrine, consolidating itself slowly but surely, and never outstripping public opinion.' William D Rubinstein, *Philosemitism: Admiration and Support in the English-Speaking World for Jews, 1840-1939* (Palgrave Macmillan, London 1999)

¹⁰¹ William Rubinstein, *A History of the Jews in the English-Speaking World: Great Britain* (Macmillan Press Ltd, Basingstoke 1996), p.194

¹⁰² David Cesarani, 'An embattled Minority: The Jews of Britain during the Great War', In Tony Kushner and Kenneth Lunn (eds.) *The Politics of Marginality. Race, the Radical Right and Minorities in Twentieth Century Britain* (Frank Cass, London 1990), p.61

¹⁰³ Geoffrey Alderman, *British Jewry since Emancipation* (The University of Buckingham Press, Buckingham 2014), p.233. For the earlier edition see Geoffrey Alderman, *Modern British Jewry* (Clarendon, Oxford 1992). Both versions have been used in the course of this thesis

loyalty and forced patriotism that embittered and discoloured many English Jews' concepts of Britain, the Empire and the questionable sacrifice of the 3,000 Jewish soldiers who forever remained on Flanders field, Gallipoli beach and the Jordan Valley.

British treatment of Jews could not simply be judged against the Tsarist and Nazi models of Jewish persecution and be deemed enlightened; anti-Jewish prejudice existed in the subtle and consistent methods of differentiation – be it snide press remarks or glass ceilings barring Jewish officers – as it did in the extreme occasions of violence, such as the Bethnal Green disturbances. Indeed, David Cesarani has argued that 'a focus on the riots has blurred the continuity of anti-Jewish feeling and led to the irruptions of hostility being treated as the expression of particular interactions, with discrete causes, rather than as nodal points for long running waves of antipathy'.¹⁰⁴

It is the intention of this thesis to explore and evaluate these competing interpretations of the war's impact on the Jewish community and to show the high degree of complexity involved in identifying appropriately the legacy of the war for London Jewry.

The reality and rhetoric of British antisemitism will be examined in the context of highly visible events such as the Bethnal Green disturbances and the minutiae of Jew and Gentile relations in the trenches and on the Home Front. This will involve a wider discussion on how Britain interacted with and behaved towards its minority groups in the conditions of total war, with the London Jewish community the primary case study for this discussion. This thesis will employ the term antisemitism to refer to the deliberate discrimination or prejudice against Jews based on their status as Jews, and will apply the term to cases of ambivalence as well as outright hostility and violence. There is substantial evidence that antisemitism in Britain during the First World War was both prevalent and pervasive in every strata of British society, and is no less relevant in explaining the experience of Jews in Britain because it lacked the sustained violence and prejudice towards Jewish communities on the continent. However, the experience of antisemitism does not wholly characterise the

¹⁰⁴ Ibid p.76

British Jewish experience of the First World War. Whilst being sensitive to the trauma memory associated with Tsarist pogroms - in which the significance for Russian Jews experiencing hostility from their English neighbours must be analysed - the antagonism towards Jews in the East End must also be examined within the context of the history of immigration in the area and labour relations, and the particular circumstances of the war. This thesis will seek to show the complexity of the British Jewish war-time experience; it was not the success story championed by Cecil Roth and William Rubinstein, nor was it undermined by British antisemitism as perceived by David Cesarani. It is the sum of a community gripped by an acute societal crisis exacerbated by the high stress situation of war.

III. British National Identity and War Experience

It is important at this juncture to assess the uniqueness of the British experience of the First World War before placing the peculiarities of the British Jewish experience within it. British national identity from the end of the long 18th Century has been shaped by a perception of the uniqueness of the character and qualities of the British nation and individual – springing from an appreciation of the mythic virtues investing ‘free born Britons’ which nourished the patriotism of 18th century radicals. British national character was also hardened by the creation of a perceived ‘other’, particularly the French during the revolutionary and Napoleonic wars (the robust, generous and pragmatic ‘John Bull’ the antithesis to the unscrupulous, malnourished and humourless French revolutionary), and contact with other cultures and civilisations during the imperial expansion of the later 19th Century. As Linda Colley has shown, patriots in England, Scotland and Wales, forged a sense of ‘Britishness’ that diminished the historic enmity between the Celtic nations and England, accentuating the social, cultural, economic and political links that united the

three kingdoms and which prided itself on its differentiation from continental culture and idioms.¹⁰⁵

British identity was also strongly influenced by interactions with and responses to migrants. In both contemporary and subsequent assessments of Britain's historical interaction with migrant groups, the emphasis tends towards accentuating the tolerance of British society. As British patriotism was forged against the continental antithesis or 'other', so too was British attitudes to migrants often contextualised by a positive comparison with an intolerant 'other' – in the case of Jewish immigration, the Tsarist state before WW1 and Germany under the Third Reich. This positive perspective highlights the largely supportive welcome of persecuted French Huguenots in the 17th Century, the accommodation of hundreds of thousands of Eastern European Jews in the late 19th Century and the Kindertransport in the late 1930s. This narrative neglects the often hostile treatment of Huguenot migrants once their economic threat was identified, the raft of anti-alien rhetoric and agitation that characterised the British response to large scale Jewish migration from the 1880s onwards, and the disastrous ambivalence of the British public and state that saw the Kindertransport rescuees the lucky few of the tens of thousands of Jews fleeing Nazi persecution in the 1930s and 1940s.¹⁰⁶

As an island nation and the supreme naval power in the world, Britain was less concerned by the threats of aggressive conquest by its continental neighbours and therefore could forego the reassurance and safety of diplomatic alliances. However the unanimous international condemnation of Britain during the 2nd Boer War (1899-1902) and the relatively poor performances of the British armed forces during the conflict alarmed British strategists and politicians who realised the inherent weakness and isolation of the policy of 'splendid isolation' coined by the Prime minister Lord Salisbury as recently as 1896. In 1902 Britain attempted to break its isolation by seeking an alliance with Japan, and in 1904 and 1907 reached diplomatic agreements with France and Russia respectively. On the domestic front however, another potent force was

¹⁰⁵ Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (Yale University Press, London 1992)

¹⁰⁶ Op. cited. Tony Kushner, *The Battle of Britishness: Migrant Journeys, 1685 to the Present* (Manchester University Press, Manchester 2012), pp.12-13

shaping national identity, the rise of anti-German agitation. Economic rivalry, the invasion scares of the preceding decade and concerns over the number of German waiters and shop assistants strategically placed along the east coast had created a virile anti-German sentiment in British society in the years up to 1914.¹⁰⁷ The course of the war was to witness widespread anti-German riots attended by virulent newspaper attacks and the extension of pre-war anti-alien legislation.¹⁰⁸ Prussianism increasingly became the 'other' which British character was defined against.

War during the period 1899-1918 had a profound impact on British society and to notions of national identity. The frailties of British manhood and military power exposed by the Boer War produced furious debate on the necessity for improved defence over constitutional rights that were still brewing in the summer of 1914. Experience in the First World War redefined attitudes to and the role of both sexes; masculinity was no longer expressed through sport and leisure but through patriotic defence of the home and nation, symbolically collectivised in the revitalised image of 'Tommy Atkinson'. Women's sacrifices on the Homefront brought greater civic responsibilities that would be reciprocated after the war in partial enfranchisement. Given the fractious social tensions in British society during this period over labour issues, Home Rule in Ireland, women's suffrage, the House of Lords debates, and external distractions in the form of Empire, it is perhaps a true analysis from Grainger that 'unlike Germany, England/Britain did not bring a cultivated patriotism to the conflict'.¹⁰⁹ The war however shaped within many in Britain a personal patriotism sure of what Britain was and its cause in the war, through personal experience and sacrifice for its end.

Having assessed the shaping of British patriotism and national identity through war in this period, the continuing significance of the First World War and its legacy for the British public will now be discussed. The subsequent re-

¹⁰⁷ Panikos Panayi, *the enemy in our Midst: Germans in Britain during WW1* (Berg Publishers, Oxford 1991), p41

¹⁰⁸ Ibid p.223, p.49, pp54-61

¹⁰⁹ J Grainger, *Patriotisms: Britain 1900-1939* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London 1986), p307

emphasis of the Jewish community's Great War experience – demonstrated by the Jewish Museum's popular exhibition and the proliferation of *Jewish Chronicle* articles marking the Jewish contribution to the war effort – is in line with broader centenary events which combined public and academic commemoration.¹¹⁰ With 8,000 English language books and numerous academic articles and theses on the First World War already, the public and scholarly interest in the centenary has added to an already extensive field. The undeniable success of the Tower of London's porcelain poppy commemoration for every one of the British Empire's 888,246 soldiers who failed to return from the conflict is perhaps the most visually striking national contribution to this process. This has been ably supported by a plethora of state-funded initiatives such as the 'Flanders Fields 1914-2014' Memorial Garden near Buckingham Palace, the Western Front Association's own *For King and Country* exhibition in Halifax that will run until 2018, and the 1400 television, radio and online programmes the BBC produced in 2014 alone to mark the centenary.¹¹¹ In addition, November 2014 saw a huge increase in mourners for many local Remembrance Sunday services across Britain; the service in Streatham for instance had an estimated six hundred attendees paying their respects as opposed to the fifty or so who usually attend, causing more than a few logistical problems for the volunteers overseeing the service.

The last few decades have witnessed a highly impassioned and sometimes volatile revisionist assault on the legacy of the war on British society, particularly the perception of the war as a futile muddy bloodbath. By challenging the *Blackadder Goes Forth* (1989) and Alan Clarke (1961) versions of Britain's war effort, Gary Sheffield's *Forgotten Victory* (2002) began the dismantling of the 'Lions led by Donkeys' perception of the British Army in World War One, whilst historians from Zara Steiner (2003) to Max Hastings (2013) have in the last decade or so robustly demonstrated the necessity of

¹¹⁰ As one example, see <http://www.theJC.com/comment-and-debate/essays/121261/the-jewish-florence-nightingale-ww1-nurse-florence-oppenheimer>

¹¹¹ http://www.memorial2014.com/en/memorial_garden;
<http://www.firstworldwarcentenary.co.uk/events/for-king-and-country-exhibition/>;
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p01nb93y/members>

Britain's entry into the war in August 1914.¹¹² Indeed, Adrian Gregory (2008) has argued persuasively that in assessing justification for intervention and moral prosecution of the war effort, Britain in 1914-18 compares favourably to the 1939-45 conflict. Britain's pledge to defend Belgian neutrality from German aggression in 1914 was as defensible a geopolitical policy as the similar pledge made to Poland in 1939, and the suffering inflicted on the German population by the Grand Fleet's naval blockade paled into comparison with the horrors unleashed by the bombing raids on German cities in the last years of the Second World War.¹¹³ Jay Winter's seminal study *The Great War and the British People* (1986) argued that the development of a civilian war economy based on community consensus on health and a greatly expanded state apparatus paradoxically improved and prolonged the great majority of British civilian's lives.¹¹⁴ Equally, historians such as Daniel Todman (2005) and David Reynolds (2013) have improved on the work of Paul Fussell (1975) by exploding ingrained myths relating to the impact of the war on British culture and society, demonstrating how the strains and pressures of total war led to a complex interrelation of positive and negative transformations, both short and long term, within British society.¹¹⁵ Todman has shown how Britons have continually recast the meaning and legacy of the war to fit contemporary concerns regarding the state of British society. Such arguments go sharply against the grain of considered popular perspectives of the war and its legacy in Britain, shown in the overly negative and vitriolic popular responses to Gary Sheffield's work, and the incandescent fury that engulfed the Education Secretary Michael Gove early in 2014 when he declared 'The First World War may have been a

¹¹² Blackadder Goes Forth, BBC 1989. Alan Clarke, *The Donkeys: A History of the British Expeditionary Force in 1915*. (Pimlico, London 1961). Gary Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory: The First World War: Myths and Realities*. (Headline Review, London 2002). Zara Steiner and Keith Nelson, *Britain and the Origins of the First World War*. (Palgrave Macmillan, London 2003). Max Hastings, *Catastrophe: Europe Goes to War 1914*. (William Collins, London 2013)

¹¹³ Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2008), pp.294-295

¹¹⁴ Jay Winter, *The Great War and the British People*. (Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1986)

¹¹⁵ David Reynolds, *The Long Shadow: The Great War and the Twentieth Century*. (Atria Books, London 2013). Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*. (Oxford University Press, Oxford 1975); Daniel Todman, *The Great War: Myth and Memory* (Hambledon Continuum, London 2005)

uniquely horrific war, but it was also plainly a just war.’¹¹⁶ As Ross Wilson (2013) highlights, the emotive pull of the Great War for the British public refuses to dim despite the passing of the generations directly connected to it, and the endurance of the ‘Donkeys’ interpretation is a constant of the public’s assessment of the war passed down through the ‘frames of remembrance’.¹¹⁷ A potent summary of this sentiment can be found in the recollections of the veteran WH Williams, interviewed in 1980, relating how when a wounded friend ‘received his service medals, he took hold of them and slung them down the garden path and forbade his wife to touch them. That is what he thought of the war to end all wars.’¹¹⁸

How the British public responded to the outbreak of war has enjoyed a lively historiography of its own. Contemporary accounts in August 1914 stressed the excitable and organic nature of the crowds that flocked to the Mall and Trafalgar Square to demonstrate an unequivocal support for war. The jingoism of the London crowds was affirmed in the raft of politician’s memoirs in the 1930s, Lloyd George notably felt the pressure of expectation hanging over the actions of the cabinet by the ‘multitudes of young people concentrated in Westminster demonstrating for war against Germany’.¹¹⁹ ‘War enthusiasm’ became as entrenched in the public consciousness of the war as the bad generalship, mud and futility – cheering crowds in Westminster and cries of ‘over by Christmas’ are central anecdotes of the British public’s war memory. This has only comparatively recently been challenged within academic history. Arthur Marwick upheld the ‘war enthusiasm’ argument in 1965, writing ‘a great concourse of people gathered in Trafalgar square and Whitehall waving Union Jacks, singing patriotic songs and displaying “marked tendencies towards Mafficking”’.¹²⁰ Hew Strachan (2001) wrote that the picture of ‘war enthusiasm’ stood ‘in need of modification and of amplification’ but, perhaps revealing his intended readership, stated ‘its fundamental message remains unequivocal.

¹¹⁶ <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2014/jan/04/labour-gove-first-world-war-comments>. (How much of this animosity was animated by personal sentiments towards Gove himself rather than what he said is hard to tell).

¹¹⁷ Ross Wilson, *Cultural Heritage of the Great War in Britain* (Ashgate, Farnham 2013), p.187

¹¹⁸ IWM WH Williams 84/46/1 letter dated 21 August 1980

¹¹⁹ Cited in Gregory p.9

¹²⁰ Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge* (Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke 2005), p.71

The belligerent peoples of Europe accepted the onset of war'.¹²¹ More recently, Adrian Gregory (2008) has forcefully challenged the existence of a united enthusiasm for war in Britain during August 1914, in particular drawing attention to the importance of chronology in this discussion - signs of enthusiasm occurred most frequently after the outbreak of war became an established fact, not before.¹²² Catriona Pennell (2014) has shown how Britons responded to war as individuals as a result of a diverse set of factors - be it class, gender, age, profession, and location - which precludes a universally typical response.¹²³ Therefore the thorny subject of 'war enthusiasm' has been shown to be far from an acceptably nuanced concept to assess the reactions to British - not to mention the nation's minority communities - by this recent scholarship. This study will build on these more nuanced interpretations of Britain's war legacy by examining the complexity of experience thrown up by the war from the perspective of the Jewish minority. Jews living in Britain in 1914 reacted to and experienced the crucial first weeks of war on an individual basis that defies a homogenous assessment. For Jewish soldiers, tailors, politicians, mothers, war-workers, Zionists, rabbis, civil servants, and children, the war presented a wave of unique problems and pressures but equally opportunities and victories that illuminate a fuller understanding of the Jewish war experience. The thesis will also assess the British response to the war and analyse the impact of this on both the immigrant and established Jewish communities of London. In dismissing the notion of a collective 'war enthusiasm', Pennell authoritatively acknowledges the existence of a 'War culture' that permeated many different strata of British society by September 1914, that collectively judged both individuals and groups as to their patriotism and contribution to the war effort.¹²⁴ The responses to the outbreak of war and actions during it of Jewish individuals and the community as a whole were scrutinised through the specific prejudices of this war culture, to which at various points the London Jewish community stood within and alternately at odds with.

¹²¹ Hugh Strachan, *The First World War Volume 1: To Arms* (Oxford University Press, Oxford 2001), p.110

¹²² Gregory, p.11

¹²³ Catriona Pennell, *A Kingdom United* (Oxford University Press, Oxford 2012), p.5.

¹²⁴ Ibid

A metropolitan bias stands centrally within the literature of British society and culture in the First World War, despite a proliferation of works presenting a regional focus on the conflict published to coincide with the centenary.¹²⁵ London in 1914 arguably occupied a more dominating position at the heart of strategic concepts of nation and empire than it did at any other stage of its history, and far more so than in 1940.¹²⁶ The war effort in every theatre was directed centrally from London; the greater part of munitions were manufactured in the capital, almost every British and Imperial soldier passed through en route to the continent or returned via the city on leave or as casualties of war, and in an era of rudimentary communication technologies London's proximity to the front made it an information nexus for the rest of the nation. Gregory (2008) and Pennell (2014) both show the unique contribution of London communities and institutions – be it the Victoria Street offices of the National War Aims Committee or the over-proportion of Londoners as soldiers, civil servants and industrial agitators – in shaping a collective British response to the peculiar conditions of war that were a continuation rather than an interruption of pre-war societal norms.¹²⁷

The importance of how an individual community's experience of war, and their attachments to location animate broader constructions of national perspectives of the conflict, is a central theme binding a series of excellent studies collated within Jay Winter's 2007 anthology *Capital Cities at War: Paris, London, Berlin 1914-1919*.¹²⁸ Individual contributors collectively demonstrate how contemporary Londoners, Berliners and Parisians experienced and understood the global conflict and the national war effort through an attachment to 'specific locales and venues'.¹²⁹ Winter emphasises this correlation between local and national loyalties with an amusing anecdote: a uniformed soldier on leave in London in 1916 was asked if he was fighting for the Empire, to which he

¹²⁵ See for instance the new range of regional histories of WW1 published by the History Press, a typical example being Kathryn Hughes' *Great War Britain: Bradford, Remembering 1914-18* (History Press, Abingdon 2015)

¹²⁶ Jerry White, *Zeppelin Nights: London in the First World War* (The Bodley Head, London 2014), preface

¹²⁷ Gregory, *Last Great War*; Pennell, *Kingdom United*

¹²⁸ Jay Winter and Jean-Louis Robert, *Capital Cities at War: Paris, London, Berlin 1914-1919, Volume 2: A Cultural History* (Cambridge University Press, London 2007)

¹²⁹ *Ibid*, p185

enthusiastically replied yes. The empire he had in mind however was the *Empire Music Hall* in Hackney.¹³⁰ This thesis too will focus on how concepts of nation, empire and patriotism were refracted through the prism of local loyalties – in particular London loyalties. It will consider for instance how notions of the national war effort and patriotism in East London synthesised with local loyalties and concerns on race, economy and community identity.

From the local perspective, issues of gender and race were central to how communities experienced the pressures of total war. Joyce Marlow¹³¹ (1999) and Susan Grayzel¹³² (2002) have presented illuminating insights into the experiences of women during the war in a national context, but less has been said about the peculiar pressures on Jewish and Gentile women in East London during the conflict. Similarly, whilst there have been some excellent national studies on the impact of the war on male psychology and concepts of masculinity, particularly from Jessica Meyer (2009)¹³³ and Joanna Bourke (1996),¹³⁴ this study will explore masculinity and war in the context of community, race and local patriotisms. How significant were cultural stereotypes of Jewish men as weak, effeminate and unsoldierly in the experiences of Jewish soldiers in the British Army? To what extent did these slurs on Jewish manhood influence desires to fight and to demonstrate British patriotism in a martial setting, and how much was the process of the reinvention of Jewish masculinity driven by the legacy of both civil and military persecution of Jews in the Tsarist Empire?

This analysis evolves from many excellent recent works such as Gavin Schaffer's study of Jewish soldiers in British war service (2012) which demonstrates that Jewish military service in the British context (and the revival of Max Nordeau's concept of the 'muscle Jew') were reflections of a deeper Jewish desire for British integration and to 'present Jewish soldiers as equal to

¹³⁰ Ibid, p.6

¹³¹ Joyce Marlow, *The Virago Book of Women and the Great War* (Virago, London 1999)

¹³² Susanne Grayzel, *Women and The First World War* (Routledge, London 2002)

¹³³ Jessica Meyer, *Men of War: Masculinity and the First World War in Britain* (Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke 2009)

¹³⁴ Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the male: men's bodies, Britain, and the Great War* (Reaktion Books, London 1996)

their non-Jewish equivalents'.¹³⁵ The extent to which this is another symptom of a peculiarly British intolerance - pressuring its minority elements to integrate through displays of excessive patriotism - will also be examined. In contrast, the issue of Jewish non-enlistment in the East End will be examined in the context of Jewish aversion to militarism fostered by experiences of Tsarist persecution, as discussed perceptively by Jonathan Dekel-Chen and other contributors to the recent study on anti-Jewish violence in East European history (2011).¹³⁶ The legacy of anti-Jewish discrimination within the Russian army was a pressing influence for many London-based Jewish men resisting to the last military service in the British Army.

IV. Thesis Overview: Sources and Structure

This thesis is based on a diverse array of source material, incorporating the accounts of Jewish and non-Jewish experiences to establish a coherent and all-encompassing examination of London Jewry during the First World War. These accounts take the form of diaries, memoirs, letters, official military and political transcripts and communiques, as well as extensive use of both local and national newspaper reports.

There is an inherent problem involved in the use of memoirs and accounts of the First World War that have been written many years after the events described. The passage of time naturally dims the powers of recollection of any author writing from memory, and the influence of later events further distorts the memories of the former. Indeed, the phenomena of memory distortion relating to the First World War and in particular personal remembrance of it through the prism of the later and more all-encompassing experiences of 1939-1945 poses a considerable challenge to the historian of the earlier conflict. As Adrian Gregory has bluntly put it 'there are serious problems with people trying to

¹³⁵ Gavin Schaffer, 'Unmasking the muscle Jew: the Jewish Soldier in British War Service, 1899-1945' *Patterns of Prejudice*, Vol 46, Nos. 3-4, (2012)

¹³⁶ Dekel-Chen, *Anti-Jewish Violence*

reconstruct their attitudes in 1914-1918 in interviews after 1945.¹³⁷ A case in point are the testimonials of the veterans of the Jewish Legion stored at the Beit Hagudim Museum in Avichail, Israel, used in chapter three of this thesis. The testimonials provide invaluable clues as to the men's motivations for enlistment but they can only tell us so much. In the majority they reveal information on the veterans' lives such as the place and date of birth and brief descriptions of their activities before, during and after their time in the Legion. Written personally or by family members, they are rendered problematic by the many years that passed between service and the writing of the testimonials in the late 1950s. They provide however, illuminating clues as to the soldiers' personal and political interest in the Battalions and their experiences of active service as Jewish soldiers fighting for Britain. The collection of so many accounts of Jewish soldiers fighting in the same unit allows for a more thorough assessment of these collective experiences for the purposes of demographic data than the relatively sparse and unconnected voices of Jewish soldiers scattered across the various battalions of the British Army. The testimonials allow us to tally up collective information on important topics such as motivations for enlistment, attachment to Zionism before and after service and involvement in London society post-war, allowing wide ranging and insightful assessments of the impact of the Battalions on the continuing development of London Jewry.

The problem of refracted memory also relates to the use of recorded interviews with veterans used for this thesis held at the Imperial War museum, the National Archives in Kew and the extensive collection of sound recordings online on the British Library's Europeana project. The majority of these interviews were performed in the 1980s when the individuals recorded were of significantly advanced age and the powers of recall potentially greatly diminished. However, the value inherent in these recordings is the essential human narrative of events that all too easily can be reduced to mere footnotes in the archival records. For instance, Jacob Plotzker, interviewed by the IWM in 1992 at the grand old age of 91, reveals fascinating detail of the experiences of the Jewish soldiers serving in the 47th Royal Fusiliers battalion in France, for

¹³⁷ Ibid, p.6

which there is scant evidence for outside of a rather dry War Office directive in June 1919 ordering the closure of the Jewish Battalion depot in Plymouth and the reassigning of the remaining 300 Jewish soldiers for service with the 47th to relieve demobilised soldiers.¹³⁸ Plotzker's recollections adds flesh to the skeletal information of the official correspondence whilst confirming the mutual authenticity of both sources, revealing the duties, hardships, and the trials and tribulations of a sizeable contingent of Jewish soldiers that would otherwise be limited to a statistic.¹³⁹

The thesis relies on the social and political commentary provided by a wide range of national and local newspapers during the war. As the historian Edward Royle stated when discussing the divergence of opinion between two local newspapers in their assessment of the same Chartist meeting in 1842: 'Newspapers reports are important sources for the historian but they have many drawbacks.'¹⁴⁰ An example can be found in the polar-opposite assessments of the Bethnal Green disturbances presented in the reports of the *Jewish Chronicle* and the anti-immigrant *East London Observer*, even though both papers relied heavily for information on the same police report. Newspapers intrinsically represent the natural bias of their editor and readership. However use of a variety of diverse newspapers offering distinct opinions of events can provide an invaluable source for social commentary on day to day events.¹⁴¹ This thesis makes use of the editorials and correspondence letters of fifteen national and London based newspapers to provide an authentic contemporary account of the issues transforming Jewish lives and society during the First World War.

The minutes of important communal meetings recorded in the *Board of Deputies of British Jews* stored at the London Metropolitan Archive reveal the thoughts and decision making process of established Jewry on the issues of poor relief, Jewish enlistment, rationing and the prospect of rising antisemitism during the war. Combined with the personal correspondence of influential

¹³⁸ PRO, WO 33 11352 June 1919, cited in Martin Watts, *The Jewish Legion and the First World War* (Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke 2004)p.232

¹³⁹ Jacob Plotzker, IWM Cat.No11188

¹⁴⁰ Edward Royle, *Chartism* (London, 1980), p.102

¹⁴¹ Pennell, *Kingdom United*, p.5

English Jews such as the Chief Rabbi Joseph Hertz and prominent journalist and Zionist Meyer Landa held at the Anglo-Jewish Archives in Southampton, these sources provide an important insight into how the elites of established Jewry responded to the pressures of war and in particular the increasing anxiety over the issue of Russian Jewish enlistment that threatened to overshadow and characterise London Jewry's response to the war as a whole. However, it is important to combine these official sources with a cross section of the bulk of Jews in London during the war who experienced the stresses of war on the battlefield and the Home Front, and who experienced directly the consequences of the decisions made in the meeting rooms of the institutions of Anglo-Jewry. Therefore the thesis considers and uses the experiences of English Jewish soldiers recorded for posterity in the IWM and the recollections of Jewish East Enders who lived through and experienced the shortages during the war and the antagonisms of their non-Jewish neighbours. The thesis also makes use of Foreign Office and Home Office files accessed at the National Archives in Kew, which reveal key insights into the British Government's handling of sensitive issues central to the Jewish war experience, particularly Government decisions relating to the Jewish conscription crisis and the formation of the Jewish Battalions. Through this combination of sources - the wartime policy of the institutions of established Jewry, personal perspectives of ordinary Jews and the official decision making of the British government regarding Jews in Britain - this thesis will be able to present an engaging assessment of the realities of life in First World War Britain for a minority community experiencing the pressures associated with total war.

The thesis is divided into three distinct areas of focus. Chapter one 'The Jewish Home Front: Prosperity and Pressure in the East End', will focus on the wartime experiences of the Jewish community of London's East End. The chapter will explore the extent to which the experiences of 1914-1918 transformed the situation and direction of the Jewish immigrant community of East London. Non-Jewish responses to the outbreak of war will be assessed in order to contextualise the widely held notion that Russian Jews in London reluctantly embraced the war effort. It will be argued that East London

responses to war were far from the textbook patriotic reaction that the East London press would later portray, with many examples of anti-war sentiment up to, and to a lesser extent after, the declaration of war on 4 August 1914. Social relations between Jews and non-Jews in the area will be examined through a close focus on economic competition - economic and social tensions between Jews and non-Jews were exacerbated by the disruptive conditions imposed by total war. Conversely, there is also evidence the war led to greater co-operation and integration between Jewish and non-Jewish workers in the East End. It will be argued that the war presented as many scenarios for incorporating closer communal ties as it did opportunities for friction. The shared hardships of rationing and zeppelin bombing acted as an important harmoniser of relations within the working class districts of the East End. Finally, the causes, context and consequences of wartime violence between Jews and non-Jews will be assessed. The disturbances in Bethnal Green in September 1917 were the direct result of the agitation caused locally by the issue of Jewish non-enlistment. The events in Bethnal Green will be analysed within the context of rising pre-war tensions but also the high stress conditions imposed by the rigours of total war, and important questions surrounding the significance of the violence will be asked. In particular, it will be asked whether they represent localised and short lived anti-Jewish sentiments within the East End or a more ingrained intolerance towards the Jewish community based on derogatory racial stereotypes and historic economic competition. This chapter will seek to show how as a result of these factors, the First World War greatly accelerated the breakup of the old Jewish East End and the integration of Eastern European Jews into London society.

In comparison to the immigrant communities' experience presented in chapter one, chapter two 'West-End Jewry and the Great War: Patriotism Under Fire' focuses on the struggles and strains the war imposed for London's more fully integrated and predominantly West London based Jewish community. However, whilst in many respects representing polar opposite experiences, the fortunes of both communities were intrinsically and indelibly connected by wartime British hostility. This chapter will assess the extent to which established Jewry's response to the outbreak of war in August 1914 matched or

significantly differed from the metropolitan and national reaction. The war presented several highly challenging situations in which the Jewish establishment simultaneously experienced accusations of split loyalties regarding its commitment to the British war effort and criticism for a perceived failure to defend the rights of their co-religionists both at home and abroad. This chapter will employ a deeper historical approach to assess and explain the experience of established Jewry in the First World War through a discussion of the pressures associated with the changing nature of British patriotism as a consequence of the growth of militarism and imperialism in British society in the period 1899-1918. The coupling of imperialism and patriotism during these years and the accompanying clamour for a spiritually and physically strong population to protect nation and empire, placed added pressure on Britain's minority groups to demonstrate not only patriotic endeavour but martial prowess in a society increasingly concerned by the concept of degeneration and the decline of its world standing. Jews were under increasing scrutiny to demonstrate their national loyalty towards Britain during this period of heightened discussion regarding the nature of British patriotism. The chapter will also focus on the physical and psychological experience of soldiering for English Jewish soldiers on the front line. Oral and diary records from the Imperial War Museum and the Jewish Museum of London will be used to argue that, while individual examples of antisemitism towards English Jews did occur, there is a lack of convincing evidence suggesting a widespread and indoctrinated policy of prejudice against Jewish recruits within the British Army. In addition, the growth of political Zionism in Britain during the war will be scrutinised, and particularly how this development impacted on the wartime fortunes of the Jewish establishment. It will be argued here that the growth of political Zionism in Britain during the First World War split established Jewry and further deteriorated the ability of the community to find consensus on non-Zionist Jewish matters.

In chapter three, 'The Jewish Battalions: Russian Jewry and the Conscription Crisis', the focus lies on the part played by the creation of the Jewish Battalions in the transformation of Jewish society and politics in London during the war. In 1917 the British Government created the 38th Battalion of the

Royal Fusiliers (known colloquially as The Judeans), to be recruited mainly from the Russian Jewish population of London's East End. The Jewish Battalion scheme has been selected for in-depth scrutiny in this chapter as it represents an important case study encapsulating in microcosm many of the dominant themes of conflict and integration already presented in the previous chapters. The battalion scheme played a central role in the wartime deterioration of intra-communal relations between established and immigrant Jews. The importance of the unit within the context of the Russian Jewish conscription crisis was also a fundamental agent in straining Jewish and Gentile relations in the East End, and it represented an integral cog within the British Zionist movement without which the Balfour Declaration in November 1917 would probably not have come to pass. The chapter will show that heavy handed attempts on the part of established Jewry to pressure Russian Jews into enlisting into the Battalion project further alienated the immigrant population from Jewish leadership, who, it was perceived, were not acting in their interests or defending their rights in the face of British hostility. The motivations and circumstances of English East Enders for volunteering will be assessed and compared with their Russian Jewish neighbours, as well as with the volunteerism of English Jews discussed in chapter two. It will be shown that both established and immigrant Jews volunteered for service for largely analogous reasons as their non-Jewish equivalents.

The chapter will explore the British Government's role in the creation of the Jewish Battalions and its evolving attachment to Zionism as the war progressed. Despite initial scepticism of the concept, the need to assuage national anger created by the Russian Jewish conscription crisis saw the War Office sanction the creation of the Jewish Battalion in 1917, in line with the passing of the Military Convention with Russia. These two decisions effectively forced Russian Jews to choose between deportation to Russia or enlistment in the Jewish Battalion. It will be argued in this chapter that, whilst bitterly resented at the time, the government ultimatum physically and psychologically succeeded in incorporating the Jewish East End into Britain's war cause, in which the community now held a valid stake. The experience of the men that served in the Jewish Battalion will be discussed in detail here. It will specifically

examine their motivations for enlisting in an all-Jewish unit tasked with liberating the Holy Land, and also how service shaped their attitudes not just towards Zionism but to Britain as their adopted home. This will involve using veterans' testimonials from the Jewish Legion Museum in Avichail Israel, and an examination of the motivations and experiences of Jewish transferees into the Battalion from other British Army units. For Jewish transferees and recruits from the East End alike, the Jewish Battalion provided meaning for their involvement in the war, and instilled in many a layered set of identities: a community-based identity centred on their professions, but also a Jewish identity built on pride in participation with a Jewish cause and concurrently a British identity shaped by service - however reluctantly for many - in the British Army.

In many ways the experiences of established and immigrant Jews during the war are intrinsically linked – the British Jewish war story could be characterised as the extension and acceleration of the tensions existing between established and immigrant Jews in peace time but under the suffocating glare of public scrutiny examining the commitment of both English and Russian Jews to Britain's war cause. The same set of factors – British chauvinism, Jewish nationalism, sacrifice and death on the battlefield, and the shortages on the Home Front – impinged on both Jewish communities, but in different ways and different levels of intensity. However, in many other ways the wartime experiences of English and Russian Jews were diametrically opposed, based on length of residence and integration into British society, occupation and social status, that determined the acuteness of the impact of the war on their position and aspirations. By splitting the focus between the immigrant and established Jewish experience of the war, the thesis will compare and contrast the diversities in experience within London Jewry during the war. Broadly, these two chapters are concerned with an examination of the treatment of Jews by British society during the conflict; in chapter one this will focus on the interactions and antagonisms between Russian Jews and English East Enders; in chapter two the focus lies on the relationship with and treatment of British Jews by the British government. By examining separately the war experiences

of the more recent Jewish arrivals and the more established Jewish community, the thesis will provide a balanced assessment of the trials and tribulations experienced by London Jewry during the First World War. Chapter three will bring these two narratives together through an in-depth focus on the Jewish Battalion project that in many ways was the defining link between immigrant and established Jewry during the conflict, encapsulating in microcosm the strained and complicated relationship between the two communities and the extent to which these tensions were stretched by involvement with the project. English Jewish officers served alongside Russian Jewish recruits in a Zionist project initiated by the British Government despite the acute anxiety it caused within established Jewry and the hostility shown to the initiative by Russian Jews in the East End. With a focus on the Jewish Battalion story, the discussion of the war's impact on West End and East End Jewish communities will be combined in the assessment of how the creation of Jewish only unit's impacted on both Russian immigrant Jews in the East End and the Jewish elites of Mayfair and Belgravia.

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In 1914 the more integrated elements of British Jewry wielded a loose but tangible political, social and religious control over the immigrant Jewish community. Relations between Jews and non-Jews on the streets of East London remained tense, but had dissipated somewhat through attempts to regulate the tailoring industry led by Rudolph Rocker, and the slowing of immigration from 1905 onwards. Anti-immigrant organisations such as the British Brothers' League remained active but marginalised indicators of continuing discontent. The Jewish East End in 1914 retained a 'Shtetl' appearance distinct from the general London population and which was in stark contrast to its highly integrated and politically influential 'West End' counterpart. However, four catastrophic years of world conflict between 1914 and 1918 transformed the political and social position for London's Jewish community as

a whole, and radically shifted both immigrant and established Jewry's connection to and identity with Britain as their adopted home.

The First World War transformed irrevocably the appearance and position of London's Jewish community. The conflict split decisively the delicate bond between established and more recent immigrant Jews living in the metropolis. The war also had a profound impact on Jewish and non-Jewish relations in the capital, redefining British concepts of the position of the Jewish community within London society, as well as individual Jews' notions of identity and patriotism in connection with Britain. The changes to London's Jewish community in the years 1914-1918 were a complex mix of the subtle and dramatic, and the war cannot adequately be cast as a wholly negative or positive catalyst for societal regeneration in the Jewish case. The legacy of the war must be examined only in the immeasurable political, social, economic and geographic changes to the community in the period 1880-1945, and only then can the extent to which the war accelerated these dynamic processes be ascertained.

Chapter One

The Jewish Home Front: Prosperity and Pressure in the East End 1914-1918

Introduction

The coming of war in 1914 would test the fragile foundations of the Jewish East End, straining the economic, social and political roots and religious infrastructure of the community built up over the last forty or fifty years. The tense and often hostile relations between immigrant Jews and the wider Gentile population of the East End were put to the ultimate examination under the peculiar conditions of total war. Language, religion, naturalisation status and even dietary customs were issues for the local East End press to attack Jewish differentness, as well as rallying points for a community under intense public scrutiny of its position within a wartime economy. For the Jewish establishment these were points of concern highlighting the limited substance of the post-emancipation era. For East End Jews the animosity of their neighbours and the cajoling by established Jewry to toe the line only accentuated the separateness of their war experience. This chapter will seek to examine the impact of the war on the Jewish community of East London, specifically focusing on how the same set of wartime circumstances led to heightened tensions between Jews and non-Jews whilst ultimately accelerating the integration process of the Russian Jewish community into the fabric of British working class culture.

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This chapter will begin with an assessment of the East London public's reaction to the outbreak of war in August 1914. East London society displayed

a complex and ambiguous response to the outbreak of war that contradicts the popular contemporary image of a patriotic and united community. The patriotism of English East Enders would frequently be cited by the local press in negative comparisons to the apparent disloyalty and indifference of the Jewish East End. Having set the background of the broader East End reaction to the outbreak of the First World War, the chapter will next examine the economic impact of the war on the East End Jewish economy and the implications of economic change for Jewish/non-Jewish relations in the area. The Jewish East End was economically dependent on low-wage industries such as tailoring. The majority of the 100,000 Jewish residents of East London in 1914 lived in cramped, unsanitary and distressed tenements that characterised the poorest conditions of London's working class life.¹⁴² Economic rivalry with British workers was rife; the large pool of cheap Jewish labour and the deregulated state of the tailoring industry allowed the workshop owners to keep pay and conditions for workers at a minimum, thus undercutting the competition from English tailoring businesses. The area had witnessed sporadic episodes of industrial unrest prior to the outbreak of war in 1914. This was due in part to an embryonic but increasingly sophisticated and protectionist labour union movement seeking a cessation to unfair and exploitative working conditions amongst East London's various small workshop-based industries, of which Jews made up a significant proportion of the workforce.¹⁴³ The Rudolf Rocker-led Jewish tailoring strike of 1912 was the most recent occurrence of pragmatic labour action within the East London Jewish community, but its impetus and impact were short-lived and decidedly mixed, ultimately succeeding only in stoking tensions with non-Jewish tailors who saw the strike as further attempts to encroach on their share of the industry.¹⁴⁴ Prior to 1914 therefore, the Jewish working class lacked committed leadership, and there was little prospect of co-operation and unity with English labour movements within the East End.

¹⁴² 'Report of the Lancet Special Sanitary Commission on the Polish Colony of Jew Tailors', *The Lancet*, 3 May 1884

¹⁴³ See Bernard Waites, *A Class Society at War: England 1914-1918*, (Berg, Oxford 1987) and Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, (Little Brown, London 1966)

¹⁴⁴ See Rudolph Rocker, *The London Years* (translated by Joseph Leftwich). (Robert Anscombe & Co, London 1956)

The East London Jewish economy was disadvantaged economically in the early months of the war by its heavy involvement in the tailoring industry that relied on materials imported at the London Docks. The dislocation of world trade in 1914 led to the virtual cessation of activity at the dockyards, leading to financial ruin and high unemployment amongst Jewish tailors.¹⁴⁵ Early wartime animosity towards the community revealed itself in the rejection of Jewish appeals to relief committees in Stepney and other East London districts, on the grounds they were 'not naturalised British subjects'.¹⁴⁶ Jewish applicants for aid were instead referred to the Jewish Board of Guardians who begrudgingly covered the burdens of their co-religionists, anxious to prevent the East London immigrants becoming a 'potential weak link in the solid front of Anglo-Jewish patriotism'.¹⁴⁷ Economic distress was short-lived, as the securing of government contracts for army uniforms solved the stagnation in the Jewish tailoring industry and led to a significant wage increase for the majority of Jewish tailors, even unskilled youths.¹⁴⁸ The reaction amongst the local population to the prosperity of the Jewish working class was fierce, the *East London Observer* and the *East London Advertiser* led campaigns to enforce military service for immigrants, railing against Jewish 'shirkers' profiting at the expense of the English worker absent through service at the Front. Following the passing of the Military Service Bill into law in June 1916, attention turned towards Jewish conscientious objectors. Many objected on religious grounds. By joining the army, they would inevitably have to break the Sabbath as well as struggle to procure kosher meat or infringe on religious teaching in numerous other ways. The resulting military tribunals across the East End witnessed theatrical clashes in the courtrooms between Jewish applicants and their supporters and Gentile protestors, scenes retold in their entirety in the local press adding to the impression of unpatriotic behaviour on the part of the Jewish community.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁵ Anne Kershen. *Trade Unionism amongst the Jewish Tailoring Workers of London 1872-1915*. (London Museum of Jewish Life, London 1988)

¹⁴⁶ Cited in Julia Bush. 'East London Jews and the First World War', *London Journal*, 6 (1980) p.149

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid* p.148

¹⁴⁸ Jewish Board of Guardians Report 1915 (1915)

¹⁴⁹ *East London Observer* (hereafter *ELO*), 18 March, 1 April, 16 September 1916; *East London Advertiser* (hereafter *ELA*) 20 May 1916

This chapter will next examine the role of the First World War on accelerating the integration of London's immigrant Jewish community, and will employ the anglicisation of Jewish food during the war as a parameter for the wider process of integration. Wartime food shortages and the introduction of rationing in 1917 greatly impeded the ability of Jews to comply with Jewish dietary laws. The limited Government concessions to rationing cards for the procurement of kosher meat opened up the Jewish community to accusations of special treatment during the severest period of want on the Home Front in the winter of 1917/1918. Due to the furore over the amendments and the overall difficulty in obtaining kosher food, there is evidence that many Jewish families did not comply with Jewish dietary laws until at least the end of rationing in 1920, and a significant number permanently.

The final part of this chapter will consider the effects of air raids on Jewish/non-Jewish relations in the East End and analyse the extent to which the war was responsible for a breakdown in these relations, evidenced in the anti-Jewish rioting in Bethnal Green in September 1917. Police reports reveal that 300,000 Londoners were taking shelter in the Underground stations during Zeppelin raids, with close proximity leading to friction between Jews and non-Jews. A crush caused when thousands rushed to an air raid shelter at Liverpool Street station in February 1918, leaving seventeen people dead, was reported in the *Advertiser* under the headline 'Cowardly Aliens in the Great Stampede'.¹⁵⁰ Reports of Jews escaping the air raids by retreating to the suburbs and the Kent and Sussex coasts are widespread in popular press reports and people's memories of the time. A concurrent theme in many of these accounts is the perception that Jews on the whole reacted in a cowardly and undignified way to air raids compared to the stoic response of English citizens. Local anger in the wake of heavy bombing in the summer of 1917 built on the resentment towards the Jewish community created by economic competition and Russian Jewish non-enlistment. This led to the worst incident of anti-Jewish disturbances in London since the sinking of the *Lusitania* in May

¹⁵⁰ *ELA*, 9 Feb 1918

1915 which saw many Jews caught up in a wave of Germanophobia.¹⁵¹ Bethnal Green in September 1917 witnessed armed clashes between Jewish and English youths as well as the looting and vandalism of Jewish businesses, with Jews deliberately targeted and not mistakenly victimised as in the Lusitania disturbances.¹⁵²

The cumulative effects of these controversies appeared to challenge the position and security of East End Jewry, creating the impression of a systematic campaign of hostility on behalf of the London population towards the Jewish community, leading to a degradation of its fortunes as perceived by David Cesarani and others.¹⁵³ The truth was somewhat more complex than this assessment. Whilst certain events such as the violence witnessed in Bethnal Green in September 1917 can be represented as extreme examples of anti-Jewish behaviour on the part of the London populace, this does not necessarily equate to antisemitism in its starkest form - a sustained visceral hatred of the Jewish race. The worst excesses seen in Bethnal Green pale in comparison to antisemitic riots in Russia, Germany and even France in 1914-1918. Hostility towards the London Jewish community during the war can be interpreted more accurately as the exacerbation - under the stress of war - of a historic and indiscriminate xenophobia characteristic of the London working class up to and beyond the Second World War.¹⁵⁴

The flashpoints of violence and the sensationalism of the local press obscured real evidence of co-operation and co-existence during the war between Jews and non-Jews in the East End. The philanthropic work of the Labour M.P George Lansbury's *Herald League* and Sylvia Pankhurst's *The Worker's Dreadnought* helped significantly reduce Jewish suffering in the hard early months of the war and both organisations championed the rights of

¹⁵¹ For an account of the Lusitania disturbances, see CS Peel, *How We Lived Then 1914-1918*. (London 1929), pp34-38

¹⁵² Police report Public Record Office (hereafter PRO) Home Office files (hereafter HO) 45/10822/318095/478 'Anti-Jewish Demonstration' 24 September 1917 and PRO HO 45/10810/311932/56 'Anti-Semitic Riots in London and Leeds', 24 October 1917

¹⁵³ Cesarani, 'An Embattled Minority'

¹⁵⁴ Colin Holmes, *John Bull's Island: Immigration & British Society, 1871-1971*. (Macmillan Education, Basingstoke 1988); Kushner, *The Persistence of Prejudice*

Jewish conscientious objectors.¹⁵⁵ The inaugural meeting of the Stepney Central Labour Party in June 1918 brought together delegates from both Jewish and British trade unions offering 'the prospect of Jewish and Gentile political co-operation on a much larger scale than within any of the existing socialist groups'.¹⁵⁶ 'Post-war alien problems' failed to become a major election issue at the end of the war, despite the best efforts of the *East London Observer*.¹⁵⁷

In many respects, the war accelerated the integration of the East London Jewish community. The profits of the war years provided the basis and impetus for the later movement away from the East End for many Jewish families and businesses. The Russian Revolution saw the departure of thousands of the most radicalised and anti-integrationist members of the Jewish intelligentsia, and the chaos and horror that followed the Bolshevik coup severed for many the final links with the old country.¹⁵⁸ A more subtle path of integration accelerated by the First World War was the process of anglicisation of Jewish food - or rather, the anglicisation of Jewish food tastes. Wartime shortages and the imposition of rationing restricted the ability of many Jewish families to uphold Jewish dietary laws and forced them to adopt British culinary habits. This was compounded by returning Jewish soldiers used to daily bacon rations in the Army - the senior Jewish chaplain of the British Army, Reverend Michael Adler, having issued a special exemption from observing Sabbath and dietary laws for the duration of the war for Jewish troops.¹⁵⁹

The fact that integration was in part a product of many of the wartime processes that attracted hostility towards - and the isolation of - London's Jewish community reveals the complexity of the situation. Therefore observing the war's impact in a purely positive or negative light is unhelpful to developing a clearer appreciation of the wider experience of Jews in London during the conflict. This chapter will seek to show how the impact of the war on the Home

¹⁵⁵ <http://www.workersliberty.org/node/8477>

¹⁵⁶ *ELO*, 1 June 1918 and Stepney Labour Party Annual Report 1919-20(1920). Cited in Bush, *East London Jews War*. p.157

¹⁵⁷ *ELO*, 23 November 1918

¹⁵⁸ Sharman, *Bolsheviks and British Jews*

¹⁵⁹ Interview with Reverend Arthur Bennet on the de-Judaising experience of the Army, *Jewish Chronicle* 28th Feb 1919.

Front had a wider transformative impact on the position of the Jewish community of London during the war.

V. Responses to the Outbreak of War in the East End of London August 1914

The perception that the Jewish East End collectively displayed a lack of loyalty to Britain and indifference to the nation's war cause was a popular accusation in the years 1914-1918, especially from the vociferous East London press. In highlighting the deficiencies in the Jewish war response, opponents often cited the apparently unshakeable patriotism of the English East End as a counterweight. This section will test this assertion of a patriotic and united East End. The assessment of non-Jewish responses to war and displays of patriotism will provide a comparative framework for the chapter's main focus - the closer examination of Jewish reactions and experiences of war in the East End - and provide context to the vitriol and vehemence of local anger. A full account of the East End's war experience in 1914-1918 is beyond the scope of this project, so this section will focus on the first month of the war, to assess the veracity of popular war enthusiasm before and after the outbreak of war on 4 August 1914, and how the East End subsequently mobilised for war in the proceeding weeks. It will be shown that whilst support for Britain's cause was strong within the East End, there was powerful evidence of anti-war sentiment - at least up to the German invasion of Belgium - and thereafter isolated but determined displays of pacifism that dent the proud image of a patriotic East London community justly outraged by the indifference and disloyalty of its Jewish contingent.

On 1 August 1914, the foreign secretary Sir Edward Grey communicated his convictions to the German Ambassador in London that: 'If there were a violation of the neutrality of Belgium by one combatant while the other respected it, it

would be extremely difficult to restrain public feeling in this country'.¹⁶⁰ The issue here is not if Grey himself believed this to be true or was merely engaging in a game of brinkmanship within European power politics. The question that will be asked instead is whether the British public, and East London in particular, did believe in the justice of fighting for 'plucky little Belgium' once Germany had deprived her of her neutrality? Was there widespread support for the Government's stance that ultimately took Britain to war at 11pm on 4 August, demonstrated by large flag waving crowds in the Capital, or was this merely an exaggeration of the bank holiday spirit caused by the crisis as well as a product of persuasive press rhetoric? The level of direct anti-war feeling prevalent in East London before and during the initial outbreak of war must also be examined (unsurprisingly the full reality of the existence of war dampened anti-war agitation as the nation rallied together, but opposition to the war still remained). Does the presence of well-attended and numerous anti-war meetings and rallies in the East of London and in other parts of the capital cast doubt on the image of a patriotic and jingoistic London eagerly and impatiently accepting war?

Albert Conn - born 1897 in Newham, East London, and son of a labourer in Milwall docks - believed firmly in the coming of war in 1914, citing that the growing German threat represented by her burgeoning navy and expanding foreign trade meant 'it was no surprise to most people when war was declared in the month of August 1914'.¹⁶¹ However it would appear from the absence of even moderate references to the European crisis in the local newspapers in late July 1914 that the threat of war remained a dull but oppressive background presence in East London life, relegated to an afterthought by the preparations for the bank holiday weekend fast approaching.¹⁶² Arthur Marwick has sought to quantify the transformation of the British psyche from peace to war, stating that before August 1914 'war was widely expected as an eventual probability, but it

¹⁶⁰ Sir Edward Grey to Sir E. Goschen on conversation with German Ambassador Prince Lichnowsky, 1 August 1914 in *Great Britain and the European Crisis: Correspondence and statements in Parliament, together with an introductory narrative of events*. (Taylor, Garnett Evans & Co Ltd, London 1914). p.66

¹⁶¹ Albert Conn, IWM 78/58/1

¹⁶² ELO, *ELA*, the *Eastern Post and City Chronicle* amongst others all reported invariably local news during this period and little on the European crisis, in relation to the stance taken by such newspapers following the declaration of war

was scarcely visualised at all as an immediate contingency. This explains why the breaking of war brought both a sense of long sought release and an atmosphere of panic and untempered emergency'.¹⁶³

The growing animosity between Germany and Britain that led to this expected probability of war has been well documented. Perhaps of more interest here, particularly in the East End, was that the fast unravelling European situation had been offset in many people's minds by thoughts of leisure. Whilst politicians in Whitehall, at least up until 24 July, were chiefly concerned with the growing threat of civil war in Ireland, the predominantly working class region of the East End were preparing for the upcoming bank holiday celebrations for the first weekend of August.¹⁶⁴ As Julia Bush relates 'August Bank holiday was traditionally celebrated with great zest by East Londoners. In the week before war was declared the approach of the summer holiday dominates the columns of the local press'.¹⁶⁵

Stating many years later in the House of Commons, Lloyd George attempted to defend the decision to declare war on Germany by invoking the size and passion of a war fevered crowd of thousands gathered around Whitehall demanding vengeance for Belgium.¹⁶⁶ For W J Reader, the lack of popular support in favour of war prior to the German violation of Belgian neutrality demonstrates the importance the public placed in such a transgression allowing scenes such as E.C. Powell witnessed on the August Bank Holiday as he ventured into London: 'when we emerged into Marylebone Road, we found London in a state of hysteria. A vast procession jammed the road from side to side, everyone waving flags and singing patriotic songs... We were swept along... bitten by the same mass hysteria. Westward we poured in a torrent of frenzied humanity... on to Buckingham Palace, where the whole road in front of the palace was chock-a-block with shouting demonstrators. Police were powerless to control the flood as people climbed the railings; sentries were

¹⁶³ Marwick, *The Deluge*. p.69

¹⁶⁴W J Reader, *At Duty's Call: a Study in Obsolete Patriotism*. (Manchester University Press, Manchester. 1988)

¹⁶⁵ Bush, *Behind The Lines*, p.36

¹⁶⁶ See David Lloyd George, *War Memoirs* (Nicholson and Watson, London 1933)

clapped on the back and even chaired. "The King! The King!" They yelled and chorused, and then broke into the National Anthem'.¹⁶⁷

Such apparent mass enthusiasm towards the outbreak of war was not unique to London, and was matched in spirit in the Dominion countries of the British Empire, Toronto witnessing a typical response: 'cheer after cheer from the crowds of people who had waited long and anxiously for the announcement of great Britain's position in the present conflict'.¹⁶⁸ Large patriotic displays gathered across the East End after war had been declared - large cheering crowds occupied Stratford Broadway late into the night of 4 August, after the government's ultimatum to Germany had expired.¹⁶⁹ For many reflecting on events later it was the memory of these crowds and flags that defined the outbreak of war in London. Albert Conn recollected 'I can remember that August of 1914 though, pretty warm it was, all those straw hats and the band in the park. I can remember the outbreak of war too, all the union jacks waving and the blokes lining up at the recruitment offices'.¹⁷⁰ The contemporary press were not slow to emphasise this image of an out flowing of visible patriotic enthusiasm; the *East London Advertiser* for instance relating: 'Patriotism in the East End is everywhere most marked. It is impossible to mistake the tenor of conversation in public places. Even the youngsters have caught the infection and the Union Jack was of a certainty never in such great prominence that it is at the present time'.¹⁷¹

But the extent to which this demonstrates true war enthusiasm must be questioned. How much were such crowds the product of traditional bank holiday spirit, and to what extent were such patriotic displays influenced by the atmosphere and excitement created by the rapidly escalating European situation? It is useful to compare the similarities between the description of many of the crowd scenes that have come to characterise popular enthusiasm for war and Arthur St. John Adcock's 1903 description of a London Bank Holiday: 'up the road, in a word, come boys and girls, men and women, old and

¹⁶⁷ Reminiscences of E.C. Powell, cited in Reader, *At Duty's Call* p.103

¹⁶⁸ Cited in Lyn MacDonald, *1914-1918 Voices & Images of the Great war* (Michael Joseph, London 1988.) P.2

¹⁶⁹ Bush, *Behind The Lines* p.36

¹⁷⁰ Albert Conn, IWM 78/58/1

¹⁷¹ *ELA*, 8 August 1914

young, in rags and in finery, married and single, with babies and without; and all the way by the roadside vendors of “ladies tormentors” long feathers known as “ticklers”, penny bagpipes and tin trumpets, stand contributing to the general uproar... in a word, everywhere to-day where there is any entertainment to be found a crowd is there to find it’.¹⁷²

It is not too hard to imagine such a raucous crowd flocking to the free entertainment provided by the busy and nervous ministers scuttling back and forth to Whitehall preparing for war on 4 August. Adrian Gregory also makes the point that the figures for the size of the crowd, given by various sources as somewhere between 6,000 and 10,000 people outside Buckingham Palace on 3 August and the crowd of around the same figure the following day at Whitehall have to be set within the context of a city of 7 million inhabitants. Even these figures pale in comparison to the estimated 100,000 people who swelled the streets of Central London upon the signing of the armistice in November 1918.¹⁷³ It would appear then that the raucous crowds, jingoistic flag waving and patriotic invectives which have become the dominant recollection of the outbreak of war in August 1914 is in the case of London limited to localised gatherings of a size unfit to measure the mood of such a sizeable metropolis and to some extent fuelled by the Bank Holiday spirit surrounding the opening weekend of the war.

Another important aspect casting doubt upon the popular image of a rush to join the colours is the existence, particularly in East London, of misgivings towards and open opposition to the war. Among the various religious communities within the East End there was significant disquiet at the prospect of European war. The Reverend C.H. Vine, speaking at the Ilford Men’s meeting on Sunday 3 August, according to the *East London Advertiser* ‘Spoke with a very anxious heart and perplexed mind, for we are in the presence of a national danger, such as we have never known before - the horrible possibility

¹⁷² Arthur St John Adcock, in George R Sims (Ed.), *Living London: its work and its play, its humour and its pathos, its sights and its scenes*. vol.2 (Cassell and Company Limited, London 1903) p.116

¹⁷³ Gregory, *The Last Great War*, p.15

of a terrific war overshadows all else, and the state of affairs the most trying we have ever experienced. Continuing, Mr Vine, appealed to his hearers to cherish no bitterness of spirit against the German Emperor, for he believed he had striven for peace and above all to pray to God that if possible peace may be preserved'.¹⁷⁴

Similarly, the *East End News and London Shipping Chronicle* reported the offering of prayers for peace in the numerous synagogues dotting the East End, stating on 4 August 'there is little evidence in the East End of London of sympathy or concurrence with Russia in her present situation... sons, parents, near and dear relatives are scattered throughout these lands of turmoil, and that is why the East End is watching the situation from hour to hour and praying earnestly in its synagogues that peace may yet prevail'.¹⁷⁵ It is interesting to note the conformity in the Jewish and Gentile responses at this stage of the war. In the unsympathetic response to Russia's plight, the congregations of the East End synagogues matched the hostility towards the prospect of a Russian alliance displayed by certain sections of the Jewish establishment and which will be discussed in greater detail in chapter two. The shift in popular sentiment in favour of the Russian alliance after Britain's entry into the war would cause problems for both communities, as opponents equated historic Jewish enmity towards tsarism as an anti-entente and therefore anti-British sentiment.

These examples must be treated carefully, especially Reverend Vine's sermon as we cannot know the reaction to it from his congregation, but evidence certainly exists as to the influence of religious institutions within the East End during this period. For instance the reflections of John Blake, a contemporary resident of Poplar, upon the war memorial erected at St Michael and All Angels Church in Poplar: 'Large numbers of them [casualties listed by the memorial] were members of the congregation, and were baptised there or were married at its altar. There used to be packed congregations, and many workers for the church. Many of those whose names are recorded on the memorial went there. I can remember how great a part religion played in the

¹⁷⁴ *ELA*, 8 August 1914

¹⁷⁵ *East End News and London Shipping Chronicle*, 4 August 1914

lives of the Poplar people years ago'.¹⁷⁶ Religion remained an important force and guidance amongst Edwardian society, its continuing significance demonstrated by the controversy surrounding the Education Reform Act of 1902, and the preaching of impassioned pro-peace sentiments by various East End clerics would no doubt factor in shaping East London's attitudes to the coming of war.

Sentiment ran deeper than mere anxiety at the prospect of war. Open opposition to Britain's involvement in a European conflict was prevalent in the East End of London during the first few days of August 1914. This opposition centred around, although not exclusively, the activities of the East London Federation of the Suffragettes, led by Sylvia Pankhurst. Pankhurst, concerned over the accusation that the suffragette movement sought votes only for 'ladies' and not the common woman, desired to attract working class women towards the movement and therefore established her new group in Bow East London.¹⁷⁷ Bow had precedent as a centre for anti-war activity. George Lansbury organised a meeting at the Bow and Bromley Institute denouncing war and calling for disarmament as far back as February 1899.¹⁷⁸

Like many of East London's population at the beginning of August 1914, Pankhurst was caught unawares by the outbreak of the European conflict. Britain's declaration of war coincided with a visit to Ireland to support victims of a recent shooting in Dublin. The news quickly determined her return by boat to England and back to East London and also her stance; writing for her news sheet *The Woman's Dreadnought* she said 'Europe is indeed "rattling back" to the barbarism that should be past and gone... our people are plunged into war with as little choice or fore-knowledge as is allowed to those who live under the most absolute of the old despotisms. Sir Edward Grey told Parliament that this country would lose no more by joining the war than if she stood aside. He was

¹⁷⁶ John Blake, *Memories of Old Poplar* (Stepney Books Publications, London 1977), p.7

¹⁷⁷ See Silvia Pankhurst, *Home Front: a Mirror to Life in England during the World War* (Hutchinson & Co Ltd, London 1932)

¹⁷⁸ 'War Against War' meeting. February 27th 1899. poster, Tower Hamlets Local History Library

considering only the commercial interests involved... The men in power have plunged us into war for their commercial interests'.¹⁷⁹

Not for the defence of 'plucky little Belgium' was war being waged, but to protect the financial interests of a state disregarding the wishes of its people. Pankhurst's views were echoed by certain sections of London's intellectual community, in particular emanating from Bloomsbury; Lytton Strachey suggests in a letter to a friend the existence of outside interests controlling the decisions of Grey and other cabinet members: 'it's like a puppet show, with the poor little official dolls dancing and squeaking their official phrases, while the strings are being pulled by some devilish Unseen Power'.¹⁸⁰ Although Strachey's attempt to assess the public's mood - 'So far as I can make out there isn't the slightest enthusiasm for the war'¹⁸¹ - should perhaps be treated with caution, anti-war sentiment across both the East and centre of London amongst anti-establishment circles enjoyed consensus and was clearly intent on influencing opinion.

The same edition of *The Women's Dreadnought* listed a number of anti-war meetings held in the previous week that were supported by the suffragettes and which drew popular and enthusiastic attendance.¹⁸² In particular, the East London suffragettes firmly backed the anti-war meeting held in Trafalgar Square on 2 August 1914. Whilst more conservative minded newspapers generally attacked the meeting as dangerous and subversive - enthusiastically reporting its disruption by patriotic groups - the middle ground *Daily Chronicle* provided a fairer and less partisan reflection of the meeting, describing a united and organised crowd passing a resolution 'Calling on the British government in the first place to prevent the spread of the war and in the second place to see that the country is not dragged in to the conflict'.¹⁸³ It is interesting to note the *East London Advertiser's* observation that the crowd at Trafalgar Square

¹⁷⁹ Silvia Pankhurst, in *The Women's Dreadnought*, 8 August 1914, p.82

¹⁸⁰ Lytton Strachey letter to Dorothy Bussy August 1914 in J Atkin, *A War Of Individuals: Bloomsbury Attitudes to the Great War*. (Manchester University Press, Manchester 2002), p.25

¹⁸¹ *ibid*

¹⁸² *ibid*

¹⁸³ Gregory, *The Last Great War*, p.16

‘represented the poorer section of the population’.¹⁸⁴ In 1890 the London based Marxist philosopher Freidrich Engels described East London as ‘the largest working-class district in the world’.¹⁸⁵ Charles Booth’s 1903 study of the demography of East London revealed in greater detail both the working class nature of the region and its intense poverty, with over nineteenthths of the population of Shoreditch, Bethnal Green, Stepney, Poplar and Hackney being workers, and a third of those living below an ungenerous ‘poverty line’.¹⁸⁶ It is possible to assume that given the predominantly working class make up of East London that the crowd was to a sizeable extent swelled by the rank and file of the East End, and given the limited evidence available for gauging the general sentiment towards war over the weekend in East London this could be a useful barometer for identifying a generally pacific trend.¹⁸⁷

The Trafalgar Square meeting was not the only anti-war demonstration to experience opposition, particularly following the official declaration of war. The *East End News and London Shipping Chronicle* reporting on 7 August how ‘At East Ham a socialist orator got into trouble. There was a crowd round his stand who greeted his remarks with shouts of “cheers for France and for the King”. The crowd at length grew tired of singing and booing, and proceeded to deeds. They rushed and broke up the platform, and would doubtless have broken up the speaker as well but for the presence of the police, who succeeded in getting him out of the crowd, a sadder and we hope a wiser man’.¹⁸⁸

Such reactions to anti-war sentiment were increasingly common following the German invasion of Belgium and the British declaration of war, but other factors contributing to such acts of ‘war spirit’ must be considered as well, in particular

¹⁸⁴ *ELA*, 8 August p.4 Although anti-war sentiment would grow and become more organised as the war proceeded, the reaction to such demonstrations remained the same, as shown by the hostile reception given to the East London Women’s Suffrage Federation’s march for peace in April 1917; ‘a big and vigorous crowd had assembled to receive the procession... Union Jacks were roused, and shouts of “Peace! When our boys are winning!” and “we’ll give you peace! Were heard on all sides; and now and again there were cries of pro Germans and “Traitors! Traitors!”’ Sub.1p E.E.N (THLHL) this hints that casualties did not dampen the enthusiasm for war as some commentators in August 1914 expected

¹⁸⁵ Engels cited in Michael Young, & Peter Willmott. *Family and Kinship in East London* (University of California Press, Los Angeles 1992) p.xiii

¹⁸⁶ Charles Booth cited in Bush, *Behind the Lines*, p.1

¹⁸⁷ Anti-war demonstrations in London must be put into the international context, and as Strachan has shown 288 anti-war demonstrations had taken place in 163 cities involving up to three quarters of a million people. Strachan, *the First World War*, p.121

¹⁸⁸ *East End News and London Shipping Chronicle*, 7 August 1914, p.4

the nature and role of the press. Pankhurst, upon arriving back in East London after the declaration of war, attributed enthusiasm for war to be the result of 'minds all dazed and glamoured by the torrents of press rhetoric, and the atmosphere of excitement and rumour growing apace in every seat'.¹⁸⁹ Julia Bush echoes this sentiment: 'How deep rooted was the patriotism of East Londoners? Only time would tell. Too much importance certainly should not be attached to the flag waving of the first week of August 1914. Such manifestations proved merely that government propaganda about Britain's 'just cause' and honourable duty to defend 'plucky little Belgium' spread rapidly and successfully'.¹⁹⁰ The East London newspapers enthusiastically carried the official government line to their local community, invoking the injustice of German actions and the duty of East London to support the cause of the nation, but also through the printing of patriotic songs and advertisements. The *East London Advertiser* published the song 'Britons United and True', containing the war glorifying verses:

'Our Navy the envy and dread of the world,

Our flag is the pride of the free:

But once let those colours in war be unfurled

We'll show them what Britons can be'¹⁹¹

Whilst the *East London Observer* with 'Hoch, Der Kaiser', chose a more personal attack on the German head of state to demonstrate to East Londoners the trueness of Britain's cause:

'At last we know you, War-Lord. You that flung

The gauntlet down, fling down the mask you wear.

Publish your heart, and let its pent hate pour.

And not by Earth shall he be soon forgiven

¹⁸⁹ Pankhurst, *Home Front: a Mirror to Life*, p.16

¹⁹⁰ Bush, *Behind the Lines*, p.37

¹⁹¹ *ELA*, 15 August 1914. p.3

Who lit the fire accurst that flames to-day'.¹⁹²

This pertinently jingoistic sentiment played strongly within a working class community that since the 1867 Reform Act and Disraeli's second administration of 1874-1880 had flirted with a popular Conservatism purporting imperialism and trade protectionism, but also displayed a history of radical activity supporting notions of 'Fair Play', which Germany's invasion of Belgium had clearly not adhered to.¹⁹³ However it is dangerous to overplay any notions of political consensus favouring the Conservatives in East London given Marc Brodie's work demonstrating the consistent success of the Liberals in seven of the East End's constituencies in the period 1885 to 1906, and the power of conservative newsprints to influence the population at large.¹⁹⁴

Overall, it can be argued the bank holiday spirit first masked and then heightened East End sentiments to the coming of war, and local anti-war feeling was both organised and popular before 4 August.¹⁹⁵ But as Arthur Marwick attests, attitudes - both in favour and against war - became firmly crystallised after its actual declaration.¹⁹⁶ The non-response from the German Government to the British ultimatum was witnessed in Whitehall and Trafalgar Square by a great gathering of people 'waving Union Jacks, singing patriotic songs... when the British declaration of war upon Germany was issued at the Foreign Office it was greeted with 'round after round of cheers''.¹⁹⁷ A correspondent in the *East London Observer* wrote later in the month how to his satisfaction the outbreak of war had led to a 'revival of certain "Jingo" songs by the music-hall

¹⁹² *ELO*, 8 August 1914

¹⁹³ For the success of "popular Conservatism" in the later half of the 19th century see Hugh Cunningham, 'The Language of Patriotism' in Raphael Samuel (Ed.) *Patriotisms: the Making and Unmaking of British National Identities*. (Routledge, London 1989). For examples of working class support for radical movements see the reception of the Tichborne Claimant's cause in Wapping described in Rohan McWilliam, *The Tichborne Claimant: a Victorian Sensation*, (Hambledon Continuum, London 2007)

¹⁹⁴ Marc Brodie, *The Politics of the Poor: the East End of London 1885-1914* (Clarendon Press, Oxford 2004). p.9

¹⁹⁵ Bush, *Behind the lines*. p.36- 'August Bank holiday was traditionally celebrated with great zest by east Londoners. In the week before war was declared the approach of the summer holiday dominates the columns of the local press'

¹⁹⁶ Marwick, *The Deluge*, p72. 'this opposition to the war was striking, but no more striking than the speed with which the bulk of it dissolved'

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid*, p.71 cited from *The Times* 4 August 1914

managers... in line with a very deep note of patriotism' prevalent in East London society.¹⁹⁸

On the opposite end of the scale, Sylvia Pankhurst and the East London Federation of Suffragettes continued to voice their opposition to the war in the weekly paper *The Woman's Dreadnought*, and other anti-war demonstrations continued for several days following the outbreak of war up to the point of attracting violent censor.¹⁹⁹ It can be assumed that popular support and enthusiasm did exist in East London for the war, but that in volume and consistency it did not match the popular image of a population united in this support, such as Arthur Marwick's assertion that 'British society in 1914 was strongly jingoistic and showed marked enthusiasm for the outbreak of war'.²⁰⁰ East London society showed signs of first indifference and then great anxiety towards the building crisis, only transferring towards general support following the German invasion of Belgium and the jingoism of the popular press. The support and presence of motivated anti-war groups within the East End demonstrating a complex reaction to the war by the East End of London.

This ambiguous response to war casts doubt on the later image of an impenetrable patriotism on behalf of EastEnders that was regularly compared by the local press to the apparent indifference and contempt for Britain's cause demonstrated by East London Jews. Relations between Jews and non-Jews were often highly influenced by sensationalist press rhetoric on both sides, and the high stress and stakes of the war years increased the jingoist and chauvinistic tone of the commentaries. However, economic factors had historically dictated the treatment of minority groups in the East End of London, and wartime tensions between Jews and non-Jews in the area were exacerbated by economic competition that occasionally boiled over into outright violence.

¹⁹⁸ *ELO*, 29 August 1914. p.5

¹⁹⁹ 'Barbarous War', comment by Sylvia Pankhurst in *The Woman's Dreadnought* 8 August 1914.

²⁰⁰ Arthur Marwick cited In Gregory, *The Last Great War*, p.9

VI. Total War? Jewish and Gentile Labour Relations in the East End 1914-1918

The 1901 Census reveals that amongst the Jewish population of East London, about 40 out of every 100 gainfully employed men (and 50 out of every 100 women) worked in the tailoring industry (compared to 12 for cabinet making, and 13 involved in work at the Dockyards).²⁰¹ If we trust investigators from Toynbee Town Hall that put the total East End Jewish population at 100,000 in 1900, it seems likely the total number of Jews employed in tailoring matched or exceeded the often-quoted figure of 20,000 English tailors in the East End prior to 1914.²⁰² Many Eastern European immigrants arrived in London with little or no assets and a limited skills base, thousands of whom were subsequently swallowed up by the East End tailoring industry based around the markets in Spitalfields, Whitechapel and Brick Lane. These new arrivals often found themselves working in tailoring workshops run by eastern European Jews already established in the area. Having settled in the East End prior to 1870 and risen up the hard way from 'sweated' to 'sweater', these Jewish tailoring entrepreneurs had few scruples in exploiting the desperation of fellow migrants following their path into the industry.²⁰³ Conditions in the tailoring workshops were abysmal even by Victorian standards. The medical journal *The Lancet* reveals a typical scene in 1882: 'We visited one tailor's workshop in Hanbury Street. There was only one toilet, which flushed its contents outside the pan and across the yard. In the top room 18 people were working. In the heat of the gas and stoves, surrounded by mounds of dust, breathing an atmosphere of wool particles containing dangerous dyes, it is not surprising that tailors' health breaks down from lung diseases.'²⁰⁴

²⁰¹ Vivian D Lipman, *A History of the Jews in Britain since 1858* (Leicester University Press, Leicester 1990), Intro

²⁰² Russell, *The Jew in London*. For English Tailoring figure see Charles Booth *Life and Labour of the People in London*, 3rd ed., (1902-3). Geoffrey Alderman has quoted the population of Jewish East London at the outbreak of the First World War at 180,000, a rise of 80,000 in 14 years. See Alderman, *British Jewry*, pp.117-118

²⁰³ Kershen, *Trade Unionism Jewish Tailoring*, p.6

²⁰⁴ *The Lancet*, 1884

There were more than a 1000 such workshops in Whitechapel alone by 1888, the development of the cheap Singer sewing machine in the 1860s making it possible to set up a tailoring workshop almost anywhere: backrooms, attics, basements.²⁰⁵ The large pool of cheap labour and the de-regulated state of the industry allowed the workshop owners to keep pay and conditions for workers at a minimum, thus undercutting the competition from English tailoring businesses. The working day for immigrant Jewish tailors was invariably long and arduous. Aubrey Rose, the son of a Jewish tailor living in Dempsey Street in Shadwell, recalled: 'At nights when I went to sleep, the sound of the Singer sewing machine whirled away in the workshop next to my bedroom. When I awoke in the morning I heard the same busy sound. The Singer sewing machine was my lullaby at night, and my alarm clock at dawn. My father worked 15 or more hours a day, making waistcoats for the fashionable City of London retail tailors'.²⁰⁶ Jewish tailors were not completely defenceless in this period however, and after a few abortive attempts to establish a united Jewish tailor's trade union, the 1889 'London Tailors Strike' successfully brought about an improvement in employment conditions for Jewish workers, reducing the working day to ten and a half hours and placing a limit on overtime work.²⁰⁷ The support for the interests of Jewish tailors in the strike by English trade unions - with an estimated six thousand workers taking action in the strike - belies the growing friction between Jewish and Gentile tailors, and was based primarily on the desire to block the underhand tactics that allowed Jewish workshops to outcompete their English equivalents.

Support for the strike also came from a number of Anglo-Jewish establishment grandees, who identified an improvement in the material position of immigrant Jewry with an acceleration of their acculturation and a reduction in the growing antagonism created by their presence in the East End. The Jewish MP for Whitechapel Samuel Montagu and the notional leader of Anglo-Jewry Lord Rothschild contributed both time and money to bring the strike to a

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Aubrey Rose, *A Memoir of the Old East End*, (Jewish Museum, London 2001), p.4, in National Archives Moving Here: 200 Years of Immigration in England <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+/http://www.movinghere.org.uk/deliveryfiles/JML/2001.37/0/1.pdf>

²⁰⁷ Kershen, *Trade Unionism Jewish Tailoring*, p.19

successful conclusion. Interestingly, the next major strike of Jewish tailors in 1912 saw little direct involvement from established Jewry.²⁰⁸ Anne Kershen, in her study of Jewish trade unionism in the East End tailoring industry, has hypothesised that this was a consequence of the 1905 Aliens Act that saw direct government intervention into the issue of Eastern European immigration for the first time. Prior to this intervention, established Jewry had felt pressured to resolve the issue independently. Relieved of the primary role of solving the conundrum that had plagued established Jewry since 1881, the absence of involvement in the Jewish tailoring strike of 1912 is for Kershen indicative of a conscious decision to withdraw their public role in the industrial affairs of the Jewish working class. As will be seen later in this section, the Jewish establishment would unwelcomely have to reverse this position with the coming of war in 1914 and the onset of economic dislocation that would gravely impact the Jewish tailoring industry.²⁰⁹

Conditions improved for the Jewish workers, but resentment from English tailors towards the domination of the industry by Jewish workshop owners remained. Walter Southgate, the son of an English tailor, recalled the anger amongst his father's colleagues towards their Jewish counterparts: 'When you come to experience, as he and others did, that your standard of living was menaced and pride in your craft going down the drain because of this unregulated influx of penniless people, who were being exploited, this was quite another thing, which no professional body of people would tolerate'.²¹⁰ By the summer of 1914, tensions between English and Jewish tailors in the East End were bubbling over into violence, the police intervening to break up fights between the two groups on several occasions in July alone.²¹¹ Despite calls for national and local unity following the declaration of war in August 1914, the animosity between the two groups worsened further with the economic strain the conflict brought.

²⁰⁸ Attempts by the anarchist Rudolf Rocker to organise the Jewish workers into a trade union met with moderate success and culminated in the formidable Jewish tailoring strike of April 1912. See Rocker, *The London Years*

²⁰⁹ Ibid. p20

²¹⁰ Southgate, *That's the Way it is*, p.34

²¹¹ *JC*, 28 July 1914

It is important at this juncture to explore an integral element of the East End economy that would have a large impact on the wartime fortunes of the Jewish tailoring industry: the East London dockyards. It is no surprise that, given the nature of war's ability to dislocate and detract belligerent economies, an impoverished and working class area like East London was deeply affected by the onset of war in 1914. Rises in food prices and a fall in employment levels affected most regions of Britain during the war. However the importance of the East London docklands to the country's war effort as a port for trade and ship building which sustained a great number of the population, and the high number of industrial workers lost to enlistment, put the plight of the region into sharper focus. The effects of the war on the economy of East London was not slow to materialise. The *Eastern Post and City Chronicle* reported on 8 August that 'The East End has been greatly affected by the war. The army and navy is largely recruited from this part of the metropolis and the orders calling out the reservists in both branches of the service and mobilising the territorials has made great inroads on the male population of the district. Thousands of men have re-joined their units'.²¹²

The shambolic nature of the system for recruiting volunteers in 1914 meant that many essential workers that were required to keep the nation's industry running, and consequently ensuring the continuation of the war effort, were lost to the army.²¹³ One such group of essential workers were the men who worked in and around the East London dockyards. The docks were the economic lifeblood and mouth of the city, where much of Britain's worldwide foreign trade and food stuffs arrived and was processed. Julia Bush states that "in 1914 dockers were the largest group of workers in West Ham and Poplar, and the second largest in East Ham and Stepney".²¹⁴ The *Eastern Post and City Chronicle* reported that 'East End dockers are showing remarkable enthusiasm

²¹² *Eastern Post and City Chronicle*, 8 August 1914

²¹³ Such mix ups justified to an extent the arguments of conscriptionists during the preceding years before 1914 that Britain should have a structured conscription system similar to the continental model. See R.J.Q Adams and Phillip Poirier, *The Conscription Controversy in Great Britain 1900-1918* (Macmillan, Basingstoke 1987)

²¹⁴ Bush, *Behind the Lines*, p.2

for the cause of England and her allies. Mr Ben Tillet states that they are joining or re-joining the army in hundreds'.²¹⁵

Whilst this was good news for the nation's cause on the battlefield in France and Belgium it significantly slowed the arrival of goods into the city due to the lack of anyone to unload them, contributing to the severity of the food crisis in East London. Measures were taken to relieve the situation; the Chairman of the Dock, Wharf, Riverside, and General Workers Union, Ben Tillet, proposed to Winston Churchill and the Admiralty that 'Members of the Union in the ports would be prepared to undertake ordinary labour in the matter of defences and similar work in preference to receiving relief while the work was done by the Territorials or other military forces'.²¹⁶ Measures such as this did relieve the pressure to an extent. The use of military personnel in the importation of goods into the docks allowed trade in the area to continue, albeit at a reduced level. The effects of the war were not also universally recognised; the *East London Observer* wrote as late as 15 August: 'As to the effect of the economic pressure in the East End of London, it is clear that no abnormal conditions are prevailing. "We are having what might be called a slack time" a well-known social worker in Canning Town put it, "but no real distress". There may be a few discharges at local factories, but many of these, on the other hand, are very busy indeed. Even the dockers still have plenty of work, and so long as the navy can keep the port of London open, there is not much ground for apprehension'.²¹⁷

As the situation developed however, finding any work for the remaining dockers became a real concern, with the cessation of trade with the Central Powers and the dislocation of foreign trade in general greatly reducing the amount of traffic flowing into the docklands. The financial impact on the docklands companies from the reduced trade led inevitably to pay cuts and unemployment amongst the dockers: 'The effect of the war upon the trade of the docks is already very noticeable. Most of the berths are occupied, but there is little work being done upon the boats, the chief trouble being, it seems, that the firms are unable to obtain money to pay the men. There are rumours

²¹⁵ *Eastern Post and City Chronicle* August 15th 1914

²¹⁶ Ben Tillet Chairman of the Dock and General Workers Union in *ELO*, 22 August 1914

²¹⁷ *ELO*, 15 August 1914

abroad that several firms will close down altogether'.²¹⁸ Although the East End suffered greater distress in August 1914 than rural areas where the necessity of bringing in the harvest ensured continued employment, other urban areas suffered similar difficulties, and it is interesting to compare the experiences of London to the enemy capital of Berlin; Jay Winter has shown that 'In Berlin unemployment amongst male trade unionists rose from 6% to 19% in the first two weeks of the conflict and was probably more severe amongst unorganised workers. The rise in London was more modest'.²¹⁹

Overall though, recruiting and the effects of the war on foreign trade coming through the East End dockyards led to a general decline in the local economy of the East End that could only prove disastrous for an area already suffering from high levels of poverty. The wartime decline of the dockyards had important ramifications for the Jewish East End. Much of the produce of London's tailoring workshops went via the East London dockyards en route to the continent. Britain's declaration of war on Germany and Austro-Hungary in August 1914 not only removed the Central Power's economies as markets for British tailored goods but the threat of U-boat activity forced the immediate closure of the London docks. This had disastrous economic consequences for East London industry as a whole and the tailoring trade in particular: unemployment amongst Jewish tailors rocketed as firms cut back on costs.²²⁰ The Jewish East End economy would eventually recover due to the procurement of government tailoring contracts for army uniforms, as will be discussed in more detail in the following section. The impact of the continued decline of the dockyards during the war would prolong the impoverishment of English East End families and would fuel resentment towards their Jewish neighbours as profits within the tailoring industry were increasingly flouted.

To return briefly to the economic impact on the Jewish East End in the weeks after August 1914, the plight of the Jewish poor proved an issue of contention

²¹⁸ *ELA*, 15 August 1914

²¹⁹ Winter, *Capital Cities at War* p.66

²²⁰ For more on the Docks during the war see John Pudney, *London's Docks* (Thames and Hudson, London 1975)

between the local East London authorities and the Jewish establishment as to who was responsible for their relief. Reactions to the plight of the Jewish poor on the behalf of the local East London authorities reveal the extent of local resentments towards the community. The Labour Party formed the War Emergency Workers National Committee (WNC) in the first days of the war to relieve economic distress, and it was not long before reports reached the committee of anti-Jewish discrimination.²²¹ A member of the London Trades Council wrote to the committee concerning 'the curious manner in which Stepney of all places is behaving towards its distressed people who are not naturalised British subjects'.²²² The same committee reported cases of Jewish women refused work at the Stepney borough relief workshops and Jewish trade unionists barred from positions on East London war committees.²²³ Although some cases of refusal may have been misunderstandings, there is considerable evidence to suggest the existence of 'hostility to assisting even friendly aliens, and Jews in general'.²²⁴

The Jewish Board of Guardians took on the cases, the *Jewish Chronicle* reporting that it had 'undertaken to hold itself responsible for the relief of foreign born Jews, so that they should not come upon the rates or public charity at a time when the national resources are being seriously strained'.²²⁵ The Jewish elite were anxious to prevent any accusations that the Jewish immigrants of East London were a strain on Britain's war effort, conscious in the belief that 'War breeds the feeling of prejudice from which the Jew, placed as he is, is bound to be the keenest sufferer'.²²⁶ It proved a controversial decision. The means tests used by the Board to decide applicant's cases was condemned by the WNC as 'being of such a character as to make applicants feel that they were begging' and added to the distrust felt by immigrants towards wealthy Jewish institutions'.²²⁷ Many Stepney Jews simply refused transfer to the

²²¹ Bush, *East London Jews War*, p.149

²²² Ibid,

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Bush, *East London Jews War*, p.149. For a more detailed demographic discussion of Stepney during the war see Samantha L. Bird, *Stepney: Profile of a London Borough from the Outbreak of the First World War to the Festival of Britain 1914-1951* (Cambridge Scholars, Newcastle 2011)

²²⁵ *JC*, 4 September 1914

²²⁶ *JC*, 31 July 1914

²²⁷ WNC report cited in Bush, *East London Jews War*, p.149

Board's care.²²⁸ English Jews also heavily questioned the Board's policy on this issue. The minutes of the Jewish Board of Guardians meeting on the 14 October 1914 reveal that cases of poor relief in the previous six weeks had doubled from the same period in 1913 - 796 to 1,832 - and costs had risen from £770 to £1716.²²⁹ The rise in costs, as well as the resentment by immigrant Jews of the Board's methods, led to subscribers to the Guardian's funds questioning whether their contributions were being used effectively.²³⁰ The question of economic relief for East London Jews proved an unsavoury episode for all involved. The issue revealed the anti-foreigner prejudice of many of the East London constituency authorities, and the misguided actions of Anglo-Jewish philanthropists served not only to sow further mistrust between themselves and the immigrant community but also burdened those organisations with the financial and moral guardianship of the immigrant Jewish poor.

With the securement of new markets in North and South America for British garments and the temporary reduction of the U-boat threat, the fortunes of the London tailoring trade gradually revived in the spring of 1915. The restructuring of the British economy to face the rigours of total war and the expansion of the armed forces saw an increase in the number of government contracts for uniforms rewarded to tailoring firms, ushering in what was known colloquially as the 'The Khaki Boom'. Voluntary enlistment and the introduction of the Military Service Bill had severely depleted the number of English tailors still operating in the East End by 1916. The government contracts for Army uniforms were therefore enjoyed almost exclusively by the Jewish tailoring businesses, the profits unlike the pre-war years now trickling down to the workers. The Board of Guardians reported 'the working classes have had a more prosperous time than for many years past'. Even unskilled boy and girl workers were provided the chance to earn 'abnormally high wages'.²³¹

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Jewish Board of Guardian Minutes, 14 October 1914, cited in *ibid*

²³⁰ *JC*, 2 April 1915

²³¹ Jewish Board of Guardians Report 1915 (1915) cited in Bush. *East London Jews War*. p,150

Towards the end of 1915 military service for friendly aliens emerged as the dominant issue of tension between East London Jews and the local population, with the prosperity of the tailoring trade at the heart of the controversy. The visibility of Jewish prosperity on the streets of East London was the source of local anger, and the accusations that Jewish men were 'shirking' their military duty linked with fears that immigrants were replacing British soldiers in local jobs and businesses.²³² Local newspapers took up the issue with outraged energy. The *East London Observer* stated in July 1915: 'A great deal has been said as to Jewish effort in the War, but there is a strong local feeling that the "Jew boys", as they are termed, who hang out about street corners and public houses, the cheap foreign restaurants and similar places, ought to be made to do something for the country they honour with their presence'.²³³ The newspaper's readership appears to have strongly supported its stance. A typical example from the *Observer*'s correspondence columns comes from an anonymous Stepney councillor: 'Since the war began I can honestly say that I have not come across a dozen Jewish soldiers. I have been told in many quarters that they are earning heaps of money in consequence of the shortage of men. If this is so, it is a despicable advantage to take, and the sooner it is brought to an end by conscription the better.'²³⁴

As will be discussed in more detail in chapter three, the lack of push factors such as the enlistment of friends, sense of patriotic duty, conscription and family pressure to join all prevented Russian Jewish enlistment but the relative success of the Jewish trades in wartime represented the major incentive not to volunteer. As Eugene Black put it, Russian Jews 'regarded recruitment as a thinly disguised scheme to take away their hard-won East End homes, jobs and sanctuary'.²³⁵

It will now be assessed the extent to which Jewish applicants for military service exemption were treated differently from non-Jewish applicants in the

²³² Ibid

²³³ *ELO*, 3 July 1915

²³⁴ *ELO*, 1 January 1916

²³⁵ Black, *Social Politics of Anglo-Jewry*, p.374

East End. In particular, it will be examined whether any evidence of prejudice towards Jewish applicants was motivated by their status as Jews, or as a consequence of the prevailing hostility towards the Jewish community resulting from the 'Khaki Boom'.

The Military Service Bill appeared before Parliament on 27th January 1916 and passed into law two months later. The Act enlisted all unmarried British males between the ages of 18 and 41 into the British Armed forces, with further exceptions or objections to be heard under the authority of local military tribunals.²³⁶ It is worth noting that the cases heard in 1916 up to the Military Convention with Russia concerned Jewish East Enders who had been granted full British citizenship and therefore fell under the jurisdiction of the Military Service Act, unlike their non-naturalised co-religionists. However, the cases of East End Jewish applicants were invariably portrayed by the local press as representative of the Russian Jewish community as a whole. Jewish applicants to East London tribunals on conscientious objector grounds or for religious reasons, fell victim to vehement press attacks directed at themselves and the community as a whole despite their small number proportionately. Jewish cases attracted large and often hostile galleries, and witnessed insults and violence between the applicant's supporters and the local populace.²³⁷ They acted as a stage to vent local economic grievances and anti-alien sentiment, but they were not, as has been insinuated by David Cesarani, show trials of prejudice effectively putting the Jewish community as a whole on trial.²³⁸ They were little reported nationally and where they were, press reports aligned Jewish cases with the proportionately larger number of Gentile applicants in a wider concern for why British men refused to fight. The controversial issue of conscription was a divisive factor in British politics and society in the years leading up to the war and will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter two, in the context of the reception of Jewish volunteer soldiers. However the historic British aversion to conscription is perhaps relevant to discuss here briefly in relation to the high

²³⁶ Adrian Gregory, 'Military Service Tribunals: civil society in action', in Jose Harris, *Civil Society in British History* (Oxford University Press, Oxford 2003), pp. 177-191. See also, James McDermott, *British military service tribunals, 1916–18*. (Manchester University Press, Manchester 2011)

²³⁷ *ELO*, 1 April 1916.

²³⁸ Cesarani, *Embattled Minority*. p.70

number of applications for exemptions recorded nationally. The imposition of conscription contributed to a sense of wartime upheaval within the British state. The alien and distinctly un-British concept of conscription, with all the hall marks of continental despotism associated with standing armies, had been thrust on the British public. Indeed, of the 1.2 million men now deemed to be enlisted following the Military Service Act, approximately 750,000 applied for exemption of some sort or other.²³⁹

The Jewish cases are illuminating for revealing the depth of local anti-Jewish sentiment whipped up by incendiary local press reports, and the motives provided by applicants for seeking exemption. They reveal that such motivation often derived from a hatred of militarism connected to experiences of conscription in Tsarist Russia - as well as religious objections - as much as the suspected concerns to protect their fiscal position. Such cases also provide indicators of motivation for the larger numbers of non-naturalised Russian Jews who fought conscription after July 1917 but were deprived of the chance to explain their position publicly in front of the military tribunal system, which stopped hearing Russian Jewish cases after the signing of the Military Convention with Russia.

The Stepney tribunal heard the majority of the most high profile Jewish cases in the East End, the district that led the rejection of Jewish applicants for aid during the first months of the war. The majority of applicants to the Stepney tribunal were Jewish, and in its first session in March 1916, twenty-nine applicants were refused out of thirty-three cases, a much higher rate of refusal than national averages.²⁴⁰ Tribunal members were a mix of local councillors, military representatives and local businessmen.²⁴¹ They did not represent a broad cross-section of the local population, containing few women, labourers or minorities. John Rodker, a Jewish poet born in Whitechapel who resisted enlistment on conscientious objection grounds, questioned the authority of the military tribunal system: 'somehow I made [war] non-existent till 1916 and Conscription, with the Tribunals beginning to sit, and they too I refused to

²³⁹ McDermott, *British military service tribunals*. p.24

²⁴⁰ ELO, 18 March 1916. For statistics on rejection rates see McDermott, *British military service tribunals*

²⁴¹ <http://greatwarlondon.wordpress.com/2012/08/31/should-he-stay-or-should-he-go/>

believe in, I was not going to have my conscience arbitrated on by retired soldiers, tradesmen, and professional men, all over age'.²⁴² The last point, indicating a generational clash, conforms closely to sentiments revealed nationally across the military tribunals that refusal to fight was a protest act.²⁴³ Conscientious objectors such as Rodker however made up only a small percentage of the overall cases seen by the military tribunals between 1916-1918. Adrian Gregory has estimated that as little as 2% of national appeals were made on the grounds of conscientious objection, with the majority of cases centring on domestic and employment considerations.²⁴⁴

The London tribunals and the *East London Observer* preferred to interpret Jewish motives for not fighting as part of an economic conspiracy. Jewish workers were accused of maliciously attempting to protect their war profits as Englishmen bled serving their country. The *Observer* even insinuated that disturbances in court by the applicant's supporters were pre-meditated acts of sabotage which 'might tempt one to suspect that German gold has been at work'.²⁴⁵ Many Jewish appeals were indeed made for economic reasons, but a significant number were made on religious grounds. Joining the army would mean breaking the Sabbath, eating non-Kosher food and many other religious trespasses.²⁴⁶ The number of Jewish religious ministers applying for exemption (religious ministers were omitted from the Military Service Act) was noted in the national press, where the relative weight of Jewish versus British loyalties and the competing claims of religious observance over the duties of citizenship were discussed at length.²⁴⁷ This was a matter of concern for the BoD, who discussed strategies for attesting the credentials and sincerity of religious

²⁴² John Rodker, *Memoirs of other Fronts* (London, 1932), pp111-112

²⁴³ Gregory, *Military Service Tribunals*, pp.101-108

²⁴⁴ Ibid. p.101. Gregory cites the figure of 2% from Arthur Gleason, *Our Part in the Great War* (New York 1917). For statistical evidence of other reasons for appeal, Gregory provides the example of the first session of the Banbury Local Tribunal which saw approximately 40% of appeals on domestic grounds and another 40% on employment grounds. Whilst such figures varied regionally it can be assumed that conscientious objection as an admissible factor in appeals was quite low even in London tribunals. Unfortunately as the majority of tribunal records were deliberately destroyed in the 1920s it is difficult to say with certainty.

²⁴⁵ *ELO*, 1st April 1916

²⁴⁶ Op. cited Bush, *East London Jews War*, p.151. The Chief Jewish Chaplain in the British Army Reverend Michael Adler had issued a special dispensation for Jewish soldiers to break the Sabbath and Jewish dietary requirements for the duration of the war. However, many British and Russian Jews felt he lacked the authority to make such a dispensation, and ignored it.

²⁴⁷ *The Times*, 20 April 1916. See also Cesarani, *Embattled Minority*, p.66

applicants in several meeting between April and June 1916.²⁴⁸ At length, the Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom, Joseph Herman Hertz, declared that there were no specifically Jewish grounds for conscientious objection to war.²⁴⁹ Hertz feared that high numbers of Jewish exemptions from military service would harm Jewish interests nationally, and actively supported the enlistment of Jewish ministers falling under the jurisdiction of the Act, even the priestly lineage of Cohanim who were forbidden from coming into contact with the dead.²⁵⁰ Anglo-Jewry's failure to defend the position of those Jews who rejected war on religious grounds led to accusations that the communal leadership were jettisoning their fellow co-religionists for the sake of keeping up wartime appearances, further rupturing relations with the Jewish East End as a result.²⁵¹

Fear and hatred of military conscription was also the basis for numerous appeals, one man citing that 'he was opposed to warfare, his parents having left Russia so that he should not be conscripted'.²⁵² The Stepney tribunal however gave his appeal little credence, factoring in his profession as a tailor making khaki uniforms as grounds to reject his case.²⁵³ Economic fears were central to how tribunals approached Jewish cases, and religious or other motivations were given short shrift. Examples of Jewish applicants attempting to trick the tribunals appeared frequently in the local press, the *Southern Reporter* providing a typical example in June 1916 with an account of the recent experiences of an East London tribunal member: 'The other day an old Jewish tailor applied on behalf of his son, who he said, ran the business. He (the old man) had nothing whatsoever to do with the show; and if the young man was called up he would be ruined. He got an exemption, so a few days later I called at the shop. The young man was behind the counter, and I ordered a suit of clothes. "VAT Price?" inquired the exempted one. "Oh, I shall want credit", I explained. "Fader," called the young Jew. The old man promptly appeared from

²⁴⁸ See Board of Deputies files (hereafter BoD), ACC/3121/A Minute books April to June 1916

²⁴⁹ Cesarani, *Embattled Minority*, p.66

²⁵⁰ Benjamin Elton, *Britain's Chief Rabbis and the Religious Character of Anglo-Jewry 1880-1970*. (Manchester University Press, Manchester 2009.) pp.213-214

²⁵¹ Sharman Kadish. *The Synagogues of Britain and Ireland: an Architectural and Social History*. (Yale University Press, London 2011); Cesarani, *Embattled Minority*, p.70

²⁵² *ELO*, 1 April 1916

²⁵³ *Ibid*

the back room. It was as I suspected. The old reprobate ran the business himself.²⁵⁴ This particular case hints at the widely held suspicion in the East End that Jewish businessmen were attempting to falsely exempt themselves or their sons primarily to maintain their business interests. Both the Stepney and Bethnal Green tribunals put forward resolutions to the government in the summer of 1916 which railed against aliens who were ‘allowed to strengthen their industrial position without any sacrifice’.²⁵⁵

The anti-alien sentiment arising from the tribunals inadvertently stimulated the growth of a counteractive group known as the Foreign Jews Protection Committee. Established in the summer of 1916 to defend the rights of foreign Jews from the Military Service Act and later the Military Convention with Russia, the committee claimed to represent the interests of a large number of Jewish organisations, as well as sympathetic socialist groups and labour interests. Julia Bush states the number of Jewish organisations represented by the FJPC as 22, with 7 socialist groups and 12 trade union branches also appearing under the FJPC umbrella.²⁵⁶ By October 1916 the *Observer* reported that the FJPC claimed to represent 120 organisations, but this was beyond their resources and the real number was certainly much lower. Despite this, the FJPC could boast real sway within Jewish East London labour organisations, and the group could legitimately claim to represent the mouthpiece and defender of disassociated Russian Jewish youth in the East End. The FJPC were moderately successful in uniting local resistance to national service, and the group’s activities were a significant thorn in the side of the organisers of the Jewish Battalion scheme in 1916 and 1917, as will be discussed later in chapter three.²⁵⁷ The FJPC also played an important part in establishing communication and cooperation between Jewish and non-Jewish labour groups during the later war years. The agitation surrounding military service and economic competition had previously prevented any significant collaboration between the groups, but the Russian Revolution of March 1917 galvanised the British Labour movement

²⁵⁴ “How Not to Trick Tribunals”. *Southern Reporter*, 15 June 1916

²⁵⁵ *ELA*, 20 May 1916

²⁵⁶ Bush, *East London Jews War*, p.152

²⁵⁷ Martin Watts, *The Jewish Legion and the First World War* (Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke 2004) pp.79-80

and encouraged sympathy from trade union leaders towards the plight of Jews fighting the Military Service Act.²⁵⁸

A tribunal in Shoreditch during September 1916 was interrupted mid-session by emotive talk of 'alien job-snatchers'.²⁵⁹ It is noticeable however that economic avarice, and alien status predominate in the rhetoric directed against the Jewish applicants, and little or no direct attacks were made concerning their Jewishness - either in casual antisemitic sneers identified with a background antisemitism of British society noted by Todd Endelman and David Cesarani, or in more overt terms by connoting refusal to fight with old diatribes against Jewish cowardliness.²⁶⁰ Such scenes were in line with similar attacks against Irish immigrants in the 1840s and Bangladeshi immigrant families in the 1970s, identified by the local community above all as an economic threat rather than a threat to the demographic ethnicity of the area, despite the best attempts by some anti-alien agitators.²⁶¹ East End attacks on the Jewish community was influenced by a certain 'economic xenophobia' rather than driven by a prevailing anti-Jewish sentiment, although antisemitic incidents did occur.

It was not the case that East End military tribunals were inherently prejudiced against Jewish applicants, as Julia Bush implies.²⁶² Jewish religious ministers were often granted exemption, if they could prove their credentials.²⁶³ Figures for the Bethnal Green, Shoreditch and Aldgate tribunals reveal a higher proportion of refusals of Jewish applicants but not so pronounced as to imply a distinct anti-alien bias, the Stepney tribunal withstanding. When John Rodker

²⁵⁸ Bush, *East London Jews War*, p.153

²⁵⁹ *ELO*, 16 September 1916

²⁶⁰ Cesarani has referred to 'A general level of anti-Jewish feeling, the 'background' anti-Semitism of the pre-war years' of the British public that was the basis for an escalation of anti-Jewish activity during the war; Cesarani, *Embattled Minority*, p.65. Endelman identifies a prevalent aloofness towards Jews on the behalf of English Aristocratic society that he terms 'Garden party anti-Semitism'. Todd Endelman, *The Jews of Britain 1656-2000* (University of California Press, Berkley 2002) Intro

²⁶¹ W. Evans-Gordon, *The Alien Immigrant* (1903). For more on the Aliens issue see David Glover, *Literature, Immigration, and Diaspora in Fin-de-Siècle England: A Cultural History of the 1905 Aliens Act* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2012) For an examination of East London attitudes towards immigration through the ages see Anne J. Kershen 'The construction of home in a spitfields landscape', *Landscape Research*, 29:3, (2004) pp.261-275

²⁶² Bush, *East London Jews War*. 'There is no shortage of evidence that the East London tribunals were prejudiced against Jewish applicants because they were Jewish and 'foreign'', p.151

²⁶³ Cesarani, *Embattled Minority*, p.67

eventually ended up in front of a tribunal, he found an unlikely sympathiser. The ultra-patriotic Anglo-Jewish Officer Henry Myer was adjourning conscientious objector cases in August 1916 and found himself sitting on Rodker's case: 'His name was Rodker. He described himself as a poet and an agnostic, but he was of Jewish birth and claimed it was against his conscience to kill anybody... At the time I knew that those who had been killed or maimed for life,...had been motivated by not only patriotic feelings, but had done what the leaders of all religious denominations had declared to be right (Quakers, perhaps, excepted). In retrospect however, I feel that there was much to be said on Rodker's behalf, if it were possible to define a poet'.²⁶⁴ It was however a rarity for elements of the Jewish establishment to sympathise with immigrant Jews refusing to fight, and the Board of Guardians as well as the *Jewish Chronicle* tried desperately to minimise the fallout from the cases, deeply anxious to avoid further negative publicity for the community.²⁶⁵

Overall, economic competition led to a wartime deterioration in Jewish/non-Jewish relations. Jews were accused of resisting enlistment to protect their economic position, built upon the wartime profits arising from the tailoring trades, and at the expense of English workers fighting in France. The fallout from Jewish applications to East London military tribunals contributed to the worsening animosity between Jews and non-Jews in the East End. However, prejudice against Jewish applications were predominantly the result of the economic tensions between the two groups, rather than evidence of ingrained antisemitism in the East End. This theme of economic conflict would continue to dictate events, and directly influenced the violence witnessed in Bethnal Green in September 1917. There were however, factors resulting from the war that eased ethnic tensions in the East End and ultimately contributed to the integration of the Russian Jewish community. The following section will assess the role the war played on the anglicisation of Jewish cuisine in the East End, and will discuss the importance of food as a contributor to migrant communities' integration, with war an external accelerating factor.

²⁶⁴ Henry Myer, *Soldiering of Sorts*. (Great Britain, 1979), p.68

²⁶⁵ *JC*, 6 October 1916

VII. Kosher War? The Anglicisation of the Jewish East

End 1914-1918

The case for war acting as catalyst for technological change on the battlefield has become a truism, but the role of military conflict in accelerating social and cultural trends on the Home Front is equally compelling, especially concerning the effects of war on the acculturation of a transitional community within the dominant community.²⁶⁶ Food is increasingly used as a signifier of national and immigrant identity by social historians, with Jewish food in particular revealing substantial evidence of cultural transfer experienced during the diaspora.²⁶⁷ The rigours of total war that were thrust on the belligerent nations during the First World War ensured food supply a central place within state war planning - the supply of butter and bread to the cities became as important a strategic concern as supply of bullets and shells to the front line. And yet it is only comparatively recently that academic interest in the relationship between food and war has stirred. The symposium on 'Food and War in Europe in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries' held at the University of Paris-Sorbonne in September 2009 may yet prove a significant landmark addition to the understanding of warfare as an agent of societal transformation. An excellent and wide-ranging volume *Food and War in Twentieth Century Europe* followed up this conference in 2011, encompassing the work of 18 scholars examining the impact of war on food production, allocation and consumption.²⁶⁸ This section will build on these works, and apply a close focus of the relationship between war and food as a transformative social agent onto the case study of the East End Jewish community during World War One. There is evidence to suggest that the years 1914-1920 initiated a sharp acceleration in the anglicisation of Eastern

²⁶⁶ For a typical example of the effects of war as an accelerator of the acculturation of a minority group into the dominant society see David J. Fine, *Jewish Integration in the German army in the First World War* (De Gruyter, Berlin 2012)

²⁶⁷ Ibid. See also David Kraemer, *Jewish Eating and Identity through the Ages*. (London, Routledge 2007)

²⁶⁸ Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, & Rachel Duffet, & Alain Drouard (Eds.), *Food and War in Twentieth Century Europe*. (Ashgate Publishing Limited, Farnham 2011.) p.1

European Jewish food in Britain, a process usually viewed as occurring gradually over the course of the twentieth century.²⁶⁹ It will be argued here that this process contributed to the wartime acceleration of integration of the community into British society.

For Orthodox Jews in Britain, the First World War greatly interfered with their ability to adhere to the Jewish dietary requirements of Kashrut. As we have seen, Jewish butchers and their customers fell victim to discrimination in the fall-out from local anger at the profits being accrued by the 'Khaki Boom'. Food shortages saw the price and scarcity of kosher meat rise, and rationing restricted Jews' ability to purchase it. Jewish soldiers on the whole were unable to secure kosher in the British armed forces, leading amongst many serving soldiers to a slip in the adherence of Kashrut that continued upon their readjustment into civilian life after the war. There are no precise figures available to say for certain, but it can be deduced from this that the war at least in part reduced observance of Kashrut within the East End, and accelerated the anglicisation of Jewish food. And yet to date there has been no major study of the effect of the First World War on these processes. Panikos Panayi in his article *The Anglicisation of East European Food in Britain*, saw this process gradually occurring over a period of a hundred years or so from the primacy of the Jewish food halls in the late 19th century to their eclipse in the 1980s under the onslaught of the modern supermarkets.²⁷⁰

Overall, this approach demonstrates the general process of cultural transfer to - and acculturation within - the dominant society that Eastern European Jews in Britain experienced through the course of the century. However, Panayi does not attempt to investigate the impact on this process within the context of high stress short-term events such as the First World War. Interestingly most major studies in the last 20 years or so of British Jewry in the twentieth century - including the works of Todd Endelman, Geoffrey Alderman, and David Feldman

²⁶⁹ For an assessment of this process over a longer period of time than the First World War see Panikos Panayi, 'The Anglicisation of Eastern European Jewish Food in Britain'.

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²⁷⁰ Panayi, 'Anglicisation Jewish Food', p.311

- fail to consider the relationship between food, identity and assimilation.²⁷¹ Changing perceptions of and levels of adherence to Jewish dietary laws, where they are mentioned at all, are usually combined with a discussion of the declining religiosity of the Jewish immigrant, especially among second generation Eastern European Jews. However, the centrality of food as an indicator of identity, and the importance of dietary laws within the fundamental tenets of Judaism, makes the changing nature of Jewish food tastes of great importance in any discussion of the integration and acculturation of the Eastern European Jewish community within wider British society.

Late nineteenth century Jewish immigrants arriving in East London brought a blended diet of Eastern European cuisine - bread bagels, fish and potatoes - and a traditional Ashkenazi diet of lokshen, farfel Kreplach and chicken soup.²⁷² The visibility and aroma of Jewish cuisine was a distinctive element of East London life prior to the war; around the market at Petticoat Lane 'peddlers went around with baskets of bagels - salt herrings, sauerkraut, and pickled cucumbers were sold from barrels'.²⁷³ An entry from the *Dickens Dictionary of London 1888* compiled by the author's son depicts the culinary offerings available on 'the lane' in vivid detail and is worth quoting at length:

'The London artisan often purchases the tools of his trade in Petticoat-lane on Sunday mornings; where also may be bought the highly spiced confectionary in which the children of Israel delight - the brown and sweet "butter cake", the flaccid "bola" the "stuffed monkey", and a special pudding made of eggs and ground almonds. The poorer Jews of London eat Spanish olives and Dutch cucumbers pickled in salt and water as food rather than as a relish. They love herrings steeped in brine, German sausage, the dried flesh of beef and mutton, smoked salmon, and indeed fish of all sorts, stewed with lemons and eggs, or fried in oil. Every Jewish luxury may be obtained in perfection in Petticoat-lane,

²⁷¹ Todd Endelman, *Radical Assimilation in English Jewish History, 1656-1945* (Indiana University Press, Indianapolis 1990); Alderman, *British Jewry*; Feldman, *Englishmen and Jews*. Interestingly there are no index entries for such terms as Kosher and Kashrut in either Endelman or Alderman's works, although entries for both appear in Alderman's glossary.

²⁷² Panayi, *Anglicisation Jewish Food*. p.295

²⁷³ Claudia Roden, *The Book of Jewish Food: an Odyssey from Samarkand to New York*. (Knopf, New York 1996), p.184

besides “cosher”[sic] meat, and matzoth or unleavened cakes, used at the Feast of the Passover, which falls after Eastertide... Raw and fried fish are staple commodities of “the lane”, and several fried fishmongers have been known to amass large fortunes. “cosher” rum and shrub, and liquors such as cloves, aniseed, noyeau, &c., of which the Jews are exceedingly fond, may be obtained in this quarter’.²⁷⁴

Whilst far from a meticulous authority on the Jewish East End’s culinary culture, Dickens Jr’s account does reveal the depth of cultural transfer within the Jewish migrant experience that absorbs Sephardic and Ashkenazi culinary influences into the traditional dishes of the later eastern European migrants.

It has often been argued that Orthodoxy amongst the majority of Jewish immigrant families remained strong long after arrival in Britain, with a strict adherence to the dietary laws of Kashrut, and that this was not quite so true of more established and anglicised Jews.²⁷⁵ Many Anglo-Jewish cookbooks and recipes in the *Jewish Chronicle* prior to the First World War did not adhere to Kashrut and those that did differed little from mainstream contemporary English dishes, indicating that the anglicisation of Jewish food tastes amongst the early to mid-19th century Jewish arrivals from Germany was mostly complete.²⁷⁶ Indeed, a 1900 social study of London Jews remarked that ‘the foreigners [east European Jews] are commonly shocked and scandalised at the laxity in faith, and the shamelessly ‘non-observant’ lives of their English co-religionists’.²⁷⁷ It was not as clear cut as this however, and evidence to the contrary comes from a 9 March 1911 *Jewish Chronicle* article on restaurants in the East End that claimed: ‘ninety per cent of these establishments are unworthy of the name restaurant or indeed, of Kosher... It is a moot question whether there is really a need for these unwholesome eating houses, with their ill-kept tables, unkempt patrons and uninviting fare’.²⁷⁸ The article goes on to assert that the handful of

²⁷⁴ Charles Dickens Jr, *Dickens’s dictionary of London 1888: an Unconventional Handbook* (Old House, Moretonhampstead 1993) p.140

²⁷⁵ See Tammy Russel and Sarah Manning, *Ingredients for a Jewish Life: Festivals, Family and Food* (London: Robson 2003)

²⁷⁶ See J Atrial, *An Easy and Economical Book of Jewish Cookery upon Strictly Orthodox Principles* (P. Vallentine London 1894)

²⁷⁷ Russell, *The Jew in London* cited in Englander, *History of Jewish Immigrants*, p.101

²⁷⁸ JC, 9 March 1911

'more respectable Kosher restaurants' in the East End were unlikely to attract Eastern European Jews.²⁷⁹ Clearly not all Eastern European Jews were models of chaste orthodoxy when it came to following Kashrut, as were not all English Jews converts to secularism. The upper echelons of Anglo-Jewry in particular were concerned with maintaining the integrity and observance of Jewish dietary laws within London's Jewish community. On several occasions before 1914 the Chief Rabbi and the London Shechita Board defended the practice of shechita from animal rights protestors and campaigned against the selling of bogus kosher meat.²⁸⁰ However, it would seem in general terms that culinary anglicisation within established Jewry was at a more advanced stage than their East European co-religionists by 1914.

The East End of London contained the largest collection of Jewish butchers in the country. One of the most successful, E. Barnett, owned a collection of warehouses that dominated Middlesex Street in Aldgate²⁸¹ and boasted of having 'the only sausages that bear the Shechita Board seal'.²⁸² Indeed the Jewish food industry, whilst being a key cultural pillar of the Jewish community of East London, was also increasingly a source of friction with the larger non-Jewish population. *The Lancet* reported as early as 1884 on the animosity towards Jewish tailors in Hanbury Street caused by refuse left outside the tailoring workshops, and in particular 'The large quantity of refuse from the fish, which forms a staple of the Jewish diet, mixing with the cloth dust coming from the workrooms may, perhaps, contribute to create this unpleasantness'.²⁸³ In 1903 a Royal commission set up to investigate Jewish immigration interviewed a member of the British Brothers' League, a Mr J.A Kreamer, who claimed over 200 residents had been driven out of Exmouth Street in Stepney by the establishment of a Jewish owned fish factory: 'The system by which they have

²⁷⁹ *ibid*

²⁸⁰ 'Shechita Imperilled', *Jewish World*, 20 November 1891 and a 'Kosher Warning 1901', Poster Warning against unlicensed meat sellers from the Board of Deputies. Cited from Englander, *History of Jewish Immigrants*, p.45, p.32. For a History of the Shalita Board in London see Albert Hamsun, *The London Board of Shechita* (The London Board of Shechita, 1954).

²⁸¹ NA Board of Trade 31/12323/97239. Cited in Panayi, *Anglicisation Jewish Food*, p.297

²⁸² Advert in the *JC*, 7 January 1921

²⁸³ 'Report of the Lancet Special Sanitary Commission on the Polish Colony of Jew Tailors', *The Lancet*, 3 May 1884, pp. 817-819. Cited in Englander, *History of Jewish Immigrants*, p.88

been driven off is much the same system as I am suffering from now. Next door to me there has come a pickled herring yard. I do not know whether you gentlemen know what pickled herrings are - I have never tasted one, but the odour from them is something dreadful. I have even been to Thames magistrates to ask them to help me to do away with this nuisance, but they tell me I have no redress, and all day on Sunday these pickled herring barrels are being thrown in and out of the shed. I want to live, as I consider myself a decent working man, and I want to live in a respectable street, but they are turning the street into one of the worst streets I know of in the neighbourhood'.²⁸⁴ Ominously, the man added 'I assure you, gentlemen, If you don't do something this time, it will be something more serious, for only yesterday I was talking to a clergyman in this neighbourhood who expressed himself very very strongly, and said he was an anti-Semitic man, and he would go with the people as hard as he could... The object of the British Brothers' League is to stop these pauper aliens coming here'.²⁸⁵

The strength of the anger demonstrated here shows the importance of the relationship between food and identity within social group interaction.²⁸⁶ The aroma and visibility of Jewish food was associated with unpleasant emotions for some non-Jews particularly as they represented an inescapable reminder of the continuing encroachment of the Jewish community into the heart of the East End. Diet was of central importance to how both groups defined themselves and each other; Jewish food was considered bizarre, odorous, and even unpatriotic compared to the wholesomeness of traditional British dishes such as roast beef - of which the concept rather than the reality of consumption was more important for the majority of English families for whom beef would be a rare luxury.²⁸⁷ This sentiment was connected with the resentment created by economic competition between Jews and non-Jews detailed in the previous section, and lent significant recruitment inspiration for nascent anti-Jewish

²⁸⁴ Minutes of Evidence taken before the Royal commission on Alien Immigration, Parliamentary Papers [Cd. 1742 IX (1903), qq. 9675-699, cited in Englander, *History of Jewish Immigrants*, pp.91-93

²⁸⁵ *ibid*

²⁸⁶ See Atsuko Chino, *Food, National Identity and Nationalism: From Every day to Global Politics* (Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke 2015)

²⁸⁷ See Colin Holmes, *John Bull's Island: Immigration & British Society, 1871-1971* (Macmillan Education, Basingstoke 1988)

groups in the East End, such as the British Brothers' League, that provided a model and inspiration for Oswald Mosley's The British Union of Fascists during the interwar period.²⁸⁸

The First World War greatly exacerbated these tensions. In 1914, Britain imported two thirds of the country's necessary food supplies from foreign markets. The virtual cessation of world trade and threat of German naval action put this vital supply line in jeopardy, leading to dramatic increases in food prices, not only in London, but also across the provinces. The prospect of food shortages resulting from the onset of war led some who could afford it to buy up quantities of food in bulk, and un-scrupulous shopkeepers to raise prices in prediction of the forthcoming scarcity of their produce. Within the first week of war the rise in food prices began to be felt - the *East London Advertiser* on 8 August 1914 stating: 'Probably in no part of the country will the war affect the masses of the people as in the East End of London... Already there has been a wicked attempt to take advantage of the war scare to increase the price of food unduly... the action of many shop-keepers in the East End has been of a monstrous character and householders who have been called upon to pay as much as 4d, per pound increase upon their butter have every right to resent it, for they have undoubtedly been fleeced'.²⁸⁹ On the same day *The Eastern Post and City Chronicle* reported: 'certain tradesmen in Roman-Road have made advances in the prices of provisions. Many of their former customers, indignant at this action, have gone elsewhere to "shop"'.²⁹⁰ The majority of local shopkeepers were forced legitimately to raise their prices according to the sharp market fluctuation. However, a series of press reports highlighting the actions of a few allegedly unscrupulous shop keepers led to a nationwide newspaper campaign of condemnation against unpatriotic retailers who were accused of profiteering from the war.²⁹¹ The high proportion of Jewish grocers and bakers in the East End suffered sustained pillorying in the local press, particularly from the *East London Observer*, which called for boycotts and demonstrations against 'the immoral Jewish businesses seeking to profit from

²⁸⁸ See Daniel Tilles, *British Fascist Anti-Semitism and Jewish Responses 1932-40* (Bloomsbury Academic, London, 2015)

²⁸⁹ *ELA*, 8 August 1914

²⁹⁰ *The Eastern Post and City Chronicle* 8 August 1914

²⁹¹ For more on this see Gregory, *The Last Great War*, pp.136-142

this evil war'.²⁹² There is little evidence to suggest Jewish shop keepers were guiltier of 'profiteering' than non-Jewish owners, but the prevailing hostility towards Jews driven by economic competition was often enough to confirm suspicions.

Given the loss of many families' 'breadwinners' to the army or unemployment, the onset of food shortages caused severe distress, which grew as prices everywhere increased- by an average of 16 per cent in the first week of the war alone. Many East London families were used to just 'getting by' before the war, and the impact of such food price rises, coupled with the loss of the household's main earner, meant as Julia Bush has stated 'instant hunger for many East Londoners'.²⁹³ Bernard Waites in his study *A Class Society at War*, shows the effects on such families by the increases in food prices and the strain this placed on the nation's relief services: 'In the last fortnight of August, three times as many children were fed in the borough under the 1906 legislation empowering local authorities to feed necessitous school children as had been in the corresponding weeks of 1913. The majority were children of those unemployed because of the war'.²⁹⁴

British trade gradually recovered, and a series of good harvests coupled with a steady supply of imports meant there were no food shortages in Britain for the next two years of war. However, 1916 witnessed dire wheat and potato crop harvests as well as an acute rise in shipping losses to submarine action, resulting in British cities experiencing severe food shortages and further price rises. In the East End, local councils already strained by war-related poverty amongst working class families did not have the resources to provide widespread food relief and depended on the help of charities and philanthropic organisations such as the Fabian Society to fill the holes.²⁹⁵ Many recollections of those who lived through the war fixate on the experiences of the food crisis, and the daily struggle to obtain enough, even for a minimal amount, to sustain a

²⁹² ELO, 16 September 1914

²⁹³ Bush, *Behind the Lines*, p.40

²⁹⁴ Waites, *Class Society at War*, p.161

²⁹⁵ The *Daily Herald* June 1916. It was noted in some section of the press that Jewish institutions did little to alleviate the suffering of the non-Jewish population, a harsh accusation given the costs they had accrued almost single handily supporting the Jewish poor at the onset of war that local council had refused to aid.

typical East London family. Alice Linton who was six years old and living in Hoxton at the outbreak of war, reflected: 'The shortage of food was very noticeable... There was a great shortage of potatoes, meat and especially coal. Caroline, Albert and I were sent to queue up whenever the word got round that a shop had got a supply in. We took an old wooden home-made cart to fetch the precious, half hundred weight of coal, which was all that we were allowed, and we didn't know when there would be any more'.²⁹⁶

Arthur Newton of Hackney gives a similar account of the grind of obtaining food following the onset of war: 'Many times in those days we would hear of potatoes at Smith's shop, or coal at the depot, and I would be sent to try and get some. Many times we could line up for one hour or even two only to find them sold out when one gets near'.²⁹⁷ The queuing for and scarcity of food was not unique to East London, and paled in comparison to the acute food shortages that would affect Russia and Germany in the 'turnip winter' of 1916-1917. However, the prevailing economic hardships and poverty of East London pre-war where many families were only just about able to keep their heads above water, meant the effects of enlistment, unemployment and rising food prices brought on by the war were always likely to have a particularly devastating effect on the fortunes of the East End.

The deprivation of English East Enders would be put into sharp relief by the perception that Jewish families were less affected by the onset of these shortages due to the profits accruing from the 'Khaki Boom'.²⁹⁸ Whilst it is broadly accurate that the Jewish community suffered less from the onset of food shortages, this may have had more to do with the thrift associated with Jewish home-cooked recipes, as a reporter in *The Sunday Magazine* attested to: 'What they obtain for their money is superior in the way of cooking to anything we can have... I took my stand also in the general shop of the neighbourhood, at a little after twelve mid-day, and if you ever have a desire to realise the value of a penny, and that four farthings make a penny, go there and

²⁹⁶ Alice Linton, *Not Expecting Miracles* (Centerprise Trust, London 1982), p.5

²⁹⁷ Arthur Newton, *Years of Change: Autobiography of a Hackney Shoemaker* (Centerprise Publications, London 1974)

²⁹⁸ *ELO*, September 1916 (various).

note the purchases...the farthing's worth of tea, of milk, of flour, were to help make a dinner for more than one or two people'.²⁹⁹

There were however signs that tailoring profits resulting from the war were beginning to alter what Jewish families ate. Bill Belmont (b.1910, Old Montague Street), whose father worked as a tailor in Aldgate, recalled typical pre-war East European family cuisine: 'Fish loomed large in our diet (a relic of the Russian ghetto?), with an ordinary 'schmaltz' herring as the best buy. Two herrings only cost a penny, and together with boiled potatoes formed a tasty nourishing meal'.³⁰⁰ Belmont relates that later in the war 'when money seemed to be more available' chicken replaced fish as the main ingredient in the family meals, and although these took the form of typical Jewish dishes like lokshen soup, English recipes such as roast chicken and liver-based dishes began to feature prevalently in the family diet.³⁰¹ Belmont makes no particular mention to how strictly the family adhered to Kashrut.

The renewal of the German U-boat campaign in the spring of 1917 resulted in devastating shipping losses - almost three million tons lost between March and June alone - resulting in Britain's supply of wheat shrinking to just six weeks' worth.³⁰² Rationing was introduced on a voluntary scale and then compulsorily for a series of food products from February 1918 onwards. Whilst not as systematic and enforced as the rationing system in the Second World War, it greatly reduced the variety of food types available. Rationing coupons set out strictly what items could be purchased and in what quantities - this included pork, bacon and ham ration tokens which for Jews practicing Kashrut is strictly forbidden. These tokens could not be formally exchanged, although some like Naidia Woolf's mother swapped them with a Christian neighbour for egg and cheese rations.³⁰³ This was not always possible however - some families such as that of Aubrey Rose felt the situation of the war allowed for a temporary

²⁹⁹ Mrs Brewer, 'The Jewish Colony in London', *The Sunday Magazine*, XXI (1892), pp. 16-20, 119-23, cited in Englander, *History of Jewish Immigrants*, p.71

³⁰⁰ Bill Belmont, 'As I recall'. In Murray, *Echoes of the East End*, p.170

³⁰¹ Ibid, pp.170-171

³⁰² See L. Margaret Barnett, *British Food Policy during the First World War*. (George Allen & Unwin, London 1985)

³⁰³ Naidia Woolf. 'Making Do: Rationing in Britain during the Second World War'. *Jewish Magazine*, Aug 2009 http://www.jewishmag.com/136mag/uk_rationing/uk_rationing.htm

dispensation of Kashrut and made use of the pork rations to supplement their otherwise meagre meat rations.³⁰⁴ Others sought extra kosher meat on the black market that had sprung up in the wake of the introduction of rationing. The Board of Deputies had great difficulty monitoring these unlicensed kosher meat sellers, and suspected that as many as 5,000 Jewish families within the East End may have unknowingly been sold non-kosher meat products.³⁰⁵ The Board and the *Jewish Chronicle* lobbied for the replacement of pork rations for Jews, and the Government acquiesced in May 1918, with Jewish citizens receiving replacement meat rations.³⁰⁶ This however led to accusations from non-Jewish observers that Jews were in fact getting extra rations on top of the standard allowance.³⁰⁷ Whilst this was quickly shown to be baseless, the suspicion that Jews had in some way been granted special privileges remained.

The return of soldiers in November 1918 brought another challenge. Near the beginning of the war the Chief Reverend Michael Adler issued a special dispensation allowing all serving Jewish soldiers to abstain from Kashrut for the continuation of hostilities, due to the difficulties faced in keeping kosher on the front line.³⁰⁸ Whilst many Jewish soldiers attempted to fulfil their religious obligations as best they could during their service in the British Army (as will be discussed in more detail in chapter two), many accepted this dispensation, even revelled in it, as a Jewish chaplain attached to a labour battalion in France observed: '[the soldiers] were getting an issue of bacon and pork in their daily rations. I therefore applied to the Army Headquarters for some substitute to be provided, and the request was immediately granted. Imagine my surprise and disgust upon my next visit to their camp at hearing from their Commanding Officer that the men had protested in large bodies and practically threatened to refuse work unless the bacon ration was restored for their breakfast. Now I have no doubt that the men had never tasted bacon before entering the Army; yet, in spite of a comparatively favourable Jewish environment, a short period of army life had so reduced their Jewish consciousness as to make them actually

³⁰⁴ Aubrey Rose, 'A Memoir of the Old East End' Moving here Jewish Museum of London 2001

³⁰⁵ Minutes from meeting of the Shechita Board August, 1918 ACC/3121/G/03

³⁰⁶ *JC*, April 1918 (various)

³⁰⁷ *ELO*, 16 May 1918

³⁰⁸ Michael Adler, *Jews and the Empire in the Great War* (Hodder and Stoughton, London 1919)

prefer and demand swine flesh when other food was offered them in its stead. The only reply I received upon remonstrating with them was: "It's not so bad when you get used to it!"³⁰⁹ These young Jewish soldiers were typical of 2nd generation Jewish immigrants who often held ambivalent attitudes towards religious belief at odds with the deeper religiosity of their parents, removal from whose influence and the unique circumstances of army service rendered a religious life incompatible with their interests.

The restrictions the war placed on the ability of orthodox Jews to maintain strict kashrut, both on the Home Front and in the Army, contributed to the adoption of English culinary tastes and habits that diminished - albeit in a small and not often acknowledged way - cultural differences between Jews and non-Jews in the East End. As will be discussed more fully in the main conclusion - as the thesis evaluates the longer ramifications of the war for London's Jewish community - the anglicisation of Jewish food tastes as a result of the war would ultimately form part of the fuller process of Russian Jews integration into working class East End society. In the short term though, accusations of unscrupulous practices against Jewish shopkeepers profiting from food shortages, and a largely ephemeral perception that Jews were protected from scarcity by their economic prosperity and ability to exploit loopholes in the rationing system, only added more fuel to the smouldering tensions between Jews and non-Jews as the war progressed.

VIII. Zeppelin Raids: the Enduring Image of the Cowardly Jew

The already strained relations between Jews and their Gentile neighbours in the East End of London were tested further by the death and destruction brought by the Zeppelin air raids from May 1915 until the last raid in October 1917. These attacks brought the realities and horror of the front line to the

³⁰⁹ Rev Arthur Barnett, correspondent. *JC*, 28 February 1919

Home Front. In total, thirty-four separate raids by Zeppelin airships and Gotha bomber planes were directed at London, resulting in over three hundred fatalities and leaving thousands injured or homeless.³¹⁰ Many Jews were mistakenly attacked in the anti-German riots in the wake of the first raids in 1915.³¹¹ The bombings animated British stereotypes of both Jews and non-Jews. Jews were perceived to behave in a cowardly and selfish fashion during the raids in stark contrast to the stoicism, good humour and generosity shown by 'true' cockneys.³¹² The local press blamed Jewish cowardliness for causing a fatal stampede at Liverpool Street station in 1918, and labelled as 'bomb-dodgers' Jewish families suspected of quitting the city for the countryside.³¹³ With police reports revealing that 300,000 Londoners were taking shelter in the Underground stations during Zeppelin raids, close proximity bred friction between Jews and non-Jews. However, it also encouraged cooperation in some cases. The indiscriminate wrath of the falling German bombs constructed an environment of shared struggle that partially offset the interpretation, bolstered by the 'Khaki Boom' and the conscription crisis, that Jew and non-Jews in the East End were fighting separate wars.

On 31 May 1915, a fleet of five Zeppelin airships navigated up the Thames Estuary and dropped 3000lb of explosives on Hackney, Poplar and Shoreditch, killing seven and injuring sixty others.³¹⁴ This was the first major raid by the German air force against London. Two of the victims of the raid were Jewish - an eight year old boy, Samuel Reuben and a sixteen-year-old girl, Lily Lehman.

³¹⁰ Christopher Cole, and E. F. Cheesman, *The Air Defence of Great Britain 1914–1918*. (Putnam London, 1984). This is offset against the figures for Britain as a whole: 51 raids killing 557 and injuring another 1,358 people. A significant number of the non-London victims were from Kent, an unintended target for German pilots waylaid by bad weather or navigation from their ultimate target London.

³¹¹ See Panayi Panikos, *The Enemy in our Midst: Germans in Britain during the First World War*. (Berg, Michigan 1991)

³¹² Ariela, Freedman, 'Zeppelin Fictions and the British Home Front' *Journal of Modern Literature*, Vol. 27, No. 3, Writing Life/Writing Fiction (Winter, 2004), pp. 47-62

³¹³ *ELA*, 9 February 1918; *ELO*, 20 Jan & 10 Feb 1918

³¹⁴ See Ian Castle, *London 1914-17: The Zeppelin Menace*. (Osprey Publishing, London 2008). East London was disproportionately affected by German air pilot tactics of using the Thames for navigation. Pilots would often get as far as East London before fuel/air defence forced them to drop their bomb load and turn back. Insert in appendix this map detailing routes taken by Zeppelins and Gotha bombers during the war http://i.telegraph.co.uk/multimedia/archive/02725/WW1-Charts_2725701a.jpg taken from new files in Imperial War Museum. See also Dr Peter Chasseaud, *Mapping the First World War* (Imperial War Museum 2013)

The Times also reported the miscarriage of twins carried by a Russian Jewish woman brought on by fear caused by the raid.³¹⁵ Despite Jews numbering amongst the human collateral of the raid, the Jewish community would be targeted in the wave of Germanophobia that followed. *The Times* reported on 2 June 1915: 'Probably as a consequence of the air raid acute anti-German feeling has broken out again in London. In Shoreditch yesterday morning angry mobs surrounded the premises of people suspected to be of German nationality... in the case of a shop in Hoxton-road, Shoreditch, the occupant fled when the premises were entered and was pursued down the road by the infuriated mob'.³¹⁶ The raid had come hot on the heels of the nation-wide anti-German sentiment caused by the sinking of the *Lusitania* earlier that month. The majority of the victims in the aftermath of both East End reprisal incidents were Jewish small shop owners; their German sounding names were enough for the mob to target them.³¹⁷ The *East London Observer* questioned the commitment of the Jewish community to the Entente's cause following the raid, remembering the pre-war hostility to Russia and sympathy for Germany of certain Jewish figures, leading to an angry rebuff from the *Jewish Chronicle*.³¹⁸ David Cesarani has argued that 'whilst Russian Jews were amongst the aliens affected by the riots in 1915... this was accidental as compared to the sustained animosity aroused by their reluctance to serve in the allied forces'.³¹⁹ Accidental or not, the effects of the riots left a sense of unease amongst Jewish businessmen, and even naturalised British Jews felt compelled to display their naturalisation or birth certificates in the shop window 'between the miniature flags of the allied nations' and 'as if life depended upon their preservation'.³²⁰

It would perhaps have been the case that the misdirected local violence that followed the first Zeppelin raids increased the anxiety of the Jewish populace in the event of future raids. London newspapers criticised the Jewish community for inciting and encouraging panic in the face of the raids. The *Jewish Chronicle* commented on this in October 1915: 'We have come across some mean and

³¹⁵ *The Times* Friday, 4 June 1915

³¹⁶ *The Times* 2 June 1915,

³¹⁷ Panayi, *Enemy in our Midst*.

³¹⁸ *ELO*, 7 June 1915; *JC*, 30 June 1915

³¹⁹ David Cesarani, 'An Alien Concept?', in D. Cesarani & T. Kushner (Eds), *The Internment of Aliens in Twentieth Century Britain* (Cass, London 1993), p.36

³²⁰ *JC*, 16 October 1914

wicked newspaper agitations in our time, but for sheer repulsiveness the palm must be awarded to the attacks on “alien” residents here, to which the recent raids have given rise... one newspaper [*Morning Post*], whose brutality characteristically gets the better of its prudence, openly singles out for its opprobrium “the swarms of aliens, Jews and Gentile, but mainly Jew” accused of fleeing the raids.³²¹ A developing theme in 1915 that would gain fuller attention later in the war was the accusation that Jews were quitting London altogether as a result of the bombing. The *Chronicle* again rallied to the defence: ‘Another newspaper, in its wild distraction, speaks of a hundred aliens to one native being found in Brighton, a grotesque exaggeration which would give the famous town a population of some thirteen millions, and which almost points to a mind unhinged’.³²² This fits with the wider accusation from the local press that the Russian Jewish community were attempting to ignore the reality of the conflict and its consequences for the community’s position within London society.³²³ Press reports of so called ‘bomb dodging’ by alien residents, as well as the growing numbers of Jewish applicants to the military tribunals, strengthened perceptions amongst English residents of the East End that Jews were avoiding their wartime responsibilities whilst simultaneously profiting through the ‘Khaki Boom’ from the opportunities the conflict presented.

Familiarity and improved air defences lessened the sensational impact of the Zeppelin raids as the war progressed, and defying the bomb threats became associated with an assumed peculiarity of the British national character. Virginia Woolf wrote to her friend Lady Robert Cecil: ‘My dear Nelly... I rejoiced to hear of you following the Zeppelin in a taxi; such it is to have the blue blood of England in one’s veins’.³²⁴ Heimi Lipschitz, an eight year old Jewish boy living with his family in the Jewish district of Cannon Street Road near Aldgate,

³²¹ *JC*, 5 October 1915

³²² *Ibid.*

³²³ *ELO*, 23rd August 1917 ‘Alien Antics’: ‘Recent experiences show our “lodgers” in their true colours, and reveal their sentiments. It is obvious that there is room for considerable improvement in their manners and behaviour. Street disorder and demonstration, riots in miniature, cheers for Germany and the Kaiser, with hisses for the King and groans for England, are a poor return for the hospitality and shelter given them for many years. They would be well advised to mend their ways, for such a disloyal and provocative attitude must recoil on their *relatives* and friends who are left behind.’

³²⁴ Freedman, *Zeppelin Fictions British Home Front*, p.55; Nigel Nicolson (Ed.), *The Question of Things Happening: the Letters of Virginia Woolf 1912-1922* (Hogarth Press, London 1976), p.64

recalled taking shelter from the raids at the Tilbury Docks warehouses along with other East Enders, and hearing the falsely reassuring sound of the gunfire from the nearby battery at Tower of London (despite proving largely ineffectual at shooting down German bombers and the added danger of anti-aircraft shrapnel, the guns proved a comfort to jittery Londoners - the gun placed on top of Tower Bridge was affectionately named 'Barking Charlie' by Bermondsey locals).³²⁵ Lipschitz too however, despite his young age, soon quickly became hardened to the once alien sight of the slow-moving Zeppelin ships and the monotony of the nightly trips to Tilbury, choosing to accompany his family only in the rare occurrence of an official air raid warning.³²⁶ Despite Lipschitz' indifference, Jews on the whole were characterised as responding with fear and hysteria to the raids. The mayor of Stepney, Hugh Chidgey, suggested that it might be: 'very desirable that in the western portions of the borough, official notices should be published by the police in Yiddish advising people to remain in their own houses when warning is given rather than rushing along the streets to certain large buildings', implying that it was the Yiddish-speaking Jewish population most likely to seek public shelter in the event of a raid.³²⁷

A vicar of a local East London church related a similar perspective on the courage of the Jewish population of his parish: 'these poor people are singularly liable to panic at the approach of danger. I do not profess to understand their psychology, but imagine this timorousness to be largely the outcome of the harsh treatment that has been their portion for the last 2,000 years from almost every nation. This fearfulness is shown particularly in air raids, and results in scares innumerable... I was in one of our biggest synagogues on the last Day of Atonement, when during the most moving part of the service, a cry was raised of 'Raid'. The packed congregation was immediately afoot and crowding

³²⁵ White, *Zeppelin Nights*, P.130 (Reference to 'Barking Charlie' cited by White from Henry Fuller Morriss, *Bermondsey's 'Bit' in the Greatest War*, (Clifton Publishing House & R. J. James, London 1923), p.47

³²⁶ Heimi Lipschitz, Interview as part of Europeana project online. Official air raid warnings were infrequent due to the inaccuracy of pre-radar early warning systems and the desire of the government not to create unnecessary panic and confusion from false reports of raids. See White, Jerry. *Zeppelin Nights*, pp.130-131

³²⁷ Minute Book No.25 of the *Public Health Committee of the Stepney Borough Council July 1917-November 1918*, cited in Samantha L. Bird, *Stepney: Profile of a London Borough from the Outbreak of the First World War to the Festival of Britain, 1914-1951* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle upon Tyne 2011). 21

in the narrow doorway, and it took some shouting on my part, and indeed drastic measures, to avert what looked like a very possible disaster'.³²⁸ The bishop of Stepney, Henry Paget, described how: 'One of the clergy, who has helped a number of Jewish mothers and children into the Underground station, reports that it is very difficult to soothe their distress; many of them scream loudly, tearing their clothes and beating their breasts, while the men will pluck the hair out of their beards, just as we find depicted in the Old Testament'. Paget concluded that 'there is no doubt that the Eastern temperament of the Jews makes them far more subject to alarm than our own people'.³²⁹ Rather than chasing Zeppelins around town in taxis in the style of Lady Robert Cecil, Jews were lambasted in the local press; a considerable amount of newsprint was dedicated to the issue of Jews supposedly leaving the city during raids, an accusation first surfacing during the 1915 raids. The *East London Observer* commented bitterly on the 'exodus of better-off aliens from the air raid danger zone to Maidenhead, Reading and "Brightchapel"' and accused them of causing 'health problems' in these towns.³³⁰

A British Army report entitled 'General Public Opinion Concerning the War-Aliens' in April 1918 commented on the disgust of the local population who 'saw these foreigners making continuous expeditions to the country in the already over filled trains for the express purpose of bomb-dodging'.³³¹ Written by military officers for their senior commander, the report must be treated with caution. The inflammatory language used - 'This monied and artful race' and 'the grabbing propensities of the Jewish tribe' - reveal the anti-Jewish agenda of the authors.³³² It was however supposedly the product of a general survey of public opinion across the South East, and the insinuation that the anger at the flights was connected to Jews 'buying businesses on the cheap where forced sales were made by Englishmen who had been called up' matches the sentiment in the local press that Jews were buying their safety.³³³ There is an interesting alternative theory put forward by Martin Watts that the journeys of

³²⁸ Henry Paget, *Records of the Raids* (S.P.C.K, London 1918) pp.41-42

³²⁹ Ibid. pp42-44

³³⁰ *ELO*, 10 Feb 1918, cited in Bush, *East London Jews War*, p.156

³³¹ PRO, AIR 560 16 15. Intelligence summary Part II. Week ending Monday, 22 April 1918

³³² Ibid.

³³³ *ELO*, 10 February 1918

Russian Jews from London to the Southern Coast were in fact the movements of men who had refused to enlist under the terms of the Anglo-Russian Military Convention and were being interned by the British Government at a camp in Maidstone.³³⁴ The estimated number of those interned ranges from between 800 to several thousand and the staggered shuttling of the men across the south during the autumn and winter of 1917 would have been highly visible to locals along the route. 'Bomb dodging' in any case was not a uniquely Jewish pastime. Virginia Woolf noting dryly in her diary in 1916: 'The moon is full and the evening trains are packed with people leaving London', a reference to the belief that the German bombers used the light of the full moon to successfully locate London during night raids.³³⁵

The fragile infrastructure of many East London tenements encouraged residents to seek shelter in sturdier public buildings; the London Underground for obvious reasons became a popular choice for shelter, thrusting Jew and Gentile into close proximity. *The Times* reported on this subject on 27 September 1917, noting the high number of 'alien' shelterers in the West End tube stations: 'Great numbers of the alien population of the East End, many men of military age, have taken to camping with their families three deep on the tube platforms as early as 5 o'clock in the afternoon... Last night they were camped in large numbers on all the tube stations from Charing Cross to Hampstead as early as 5.30 and at 7 o'clock there was scarcely room for passengers, to pass to and from the trains. The majority of these people come from the East, where it is pointed out there is safe accommodation for twenty times the number of people who flock to the tubes. Complaint is made of the filthy condition and habits of these people, and their migrations seriously threaten the health of the invaded districts.'³³⁶ The *Jewish Chronicle* took umbrage at this observation from *The Times*, conjecturing: 'This is evidently written on the assumption that those observed in the Tubes are "Aliens" and

³³⁴ Watts, *The Jewish Legion*, p.129

³³⁵ Nicolson, *Letters of Virginia Woolf*, p.65

³³⁶ *The Times*, 27 September 1917

that they belong to the East End. But our own observations on both Tuesday and Wednesday evenings does not bear out these conclusions'.³³⁷

The *Observer* reported that 'the majority seeking shelter at night were foreigners'; correspondents complained that 'provision should be given to British people and not 'dirty foreigners'' and railed against the behaviour of 'Jews, rich Jews above all, who were drawing attention to themselves, smoking fat cigars, and taking other people's places'.³³⁸ This type of report demonstrates the emotive nature of the issue, however conflict was rare and there is a general lack of evidence of antagonism between Jews and non-Jews within air raid shelters. Bill Belmont reveals a fairly typical experience for a Jewish family caught up in an air raid: 'During the Zeppelin raids, which occurred night after night during 1917 and 1918, we were awakened as soon as the 'maroons' sounded (they were large firework machines - the equivalent of the air-raid sirens of the Second World War) and dragged across the road. The high brewery doors were opened and we were hauled into the straw-covered sheds to shelter from the bombs. Heaven knows why we thought it would be safer there than at home, except that the building was vast and very solid looking. Hundreds of people huddled together on the straw, talking in Yiddish, whilst we kids tried to get some sleep. The all-clear was signalled by the Boy Scouts travelling the streets on scooters, blowing the "All clear" on a bugle'.³³⁹ The inflammatory tone of local press reports on the issue bred a perception of incessant conflict between Jews and non-Jews during these nightly ordeals, but on the whole most such occasions passed without major incident. Indeed Henry Paget related how: 'In one parish a part of the shelter (in the parish buildings) is set apart for the Jews, so that they may conduct their Hebrew devotions during a raid, while the parish priest leads the devotions of the Christians. Many of the neighbouring refuges are larger and safer in this neighbourhood, and the

³³⁷ *JC*, 28 September 1917

³³⁸ *ELO*, February 1918. see comparisons to similar sentiments during the second world war in Dietmar Suss, *Death from the Skies: How the British and Germans survived bombing in World War II* (Oxford University Press, Oxford 2014). p.315

³³⁹ Bill Belmont In Murray, *Echoes of the East End*. p.172

people, Jews and Gentiles, like to come to the church buildings because there is prayer the whole time”³⁴⁰.

This did not prevent the East London press blaming Jews for an unfortunate incident in February 1918, when a false rumour of an imminent air raid led thousands to rush to a locked air raid shelter at Liverpool Street station, resulting in seventeen fatalities. The *East London Advertiser's* headline ‘Cowardly Aliens in the Great Stampede’ left few in doubt as to who they believed responsible, the *Advertiser* citing alleged police sources that blamed the panic on ‘young alien men’, one of which was found with £600 in his pocket.³⁴¹ This fed off an existing discourse developed by the local press of Jews being cowardly in the face of bombing whilst simultaneously ‘doing well’ out of the war.³⁴² The evidence of congenial relations between Jews and non-Jews during air raids would suggest that this was not the prevailing sentiment of the general East London public, despite the continued ill-feeling resulting from the ‘Khaki Boom’. However, during moments of crisis such as the Zeppelin threat, Jews remained a convenient scapegoat for the East London press to assuage local anger. A managing director of an East End Clothing factory, H.M. Selby of Schneiders & Sons, cited the cowardliness of Jewish workers as a contributor to the 87.5 per cent drop in output from East End factories: ‘A) 90% of the employees were women, easily frightened and liable to panic. B) The other 10% were alien Jews, who were even more liable to panic than women’.³⁴³ Aside from the rather shameless chauvinism of Selby, such opinions are indicative of the readiness of both local and national interests to apportion blame to the Jewish community, even in the case of an external factor such as air raids. This was further demonstrated after the war by the Government’s quick acceptance of Selby’s theory during their 1922 official enquiry into the wartime fall in industrial output in London.³⁴⁴

³⁴⁰ Paget, *Records of the Raids*, p.44

³⁴¹ *ELA*, 9 February 1918. For further analysis on this incident see Bush, *East London Jews War*, p.156.

³⁴² *ibid*

³⁴³ Arnold D. Harvey, *Collision of Empires: Britain in Three World Wars, 1793-1945* (Hambledon Press, London 1992) p.397

³⁴⁴ *Ibid*. See PRO AIR 1/2132/207/121/1 ‘General effect of German raids on industry during the late war’ 16th March 1922 p.14 & p.16.

Various wartime factors were interconnected in heightening tensions between Jews and non-Jews in the East End. Arnold D Harvey has argued that the disturbances in Bethnal Green in September 1917 'may be attributed more to the hysteria generated by the German bombing' than to the wider issue of military conscription.³⁴⁵ The heavy raids on 7 July 1917 would certainly have been a factor in the events in Bethnal Green later that summer. On that occasion the aftermath of the raids witnessed localised rioting in Hackney, Dalston and Bethnal Green itself, with 30 shops (mostly of Jewish ownership) damaged.³⁴⁶ However, the anger and violence witnessed on the streets of East London in the summer of 1917 were the culmination of a number of specific war related factors - air raids, military conscription, and rationing - that heightened pre-existing tensions between Jews and non-Jews previously limited to the repercussions of economic competition in the East End.

IX. The Bethnal Green Riot: Race Relations in the East End 1914-1918

The intensity of anti-alien feeling in East London was demonstrated unequivocally in February 1917 with the holding of an extraordinary conference in Bethnal Green to discuss Jewish non-enlistment. Delegates for the Bethnal Green conference included local MPs, councillors and tribunal members from every East London borough.³⁴⁷ The theme of 'equal sacrifice' was unsubtly expressed in crude visions of Jewish economic exploitation of the war and the East End.³⁴⁸ *The Times* noted the frequency of the repeated charge of 'job stealing' in discussions, with the Mayor of Bethnal Green declaring 'Men had to sacrifice their little businesses or their small factories to serve at the front, and their neighbours of foreign parentage stepped into their laces and reaped the

³⁴⁵ Harvey, *Collisions of Empires*, p.398

³⁴⁶ Ibid, p.397

³⁴⁷ Bush, *East London Jews War*, p.153

³⁴⁸ *ELO*, 3 & 10 March 1917

reward.³⁴⁹ The conference concluded with the unanimous passing of a resolution demanding the immediate military service of all friendly aliens.³⁵⁰

There is a lack of evidence suggesting the conference was marred by racial slurs or antisemitic abuse of the Jewish population as attested by Julia Bush, but the conference's existence reveals the depth of local feeling on the issue of Jewish enlistment and its economic implications.³⁵¹ This sentiment was partly driven by the perception of inactivity on behalf of the Government in enforcing the measures enacted to solve the conundrum of Russian Jewish military service. The passing of the Military Convention with Russia in July 1917 and the establishment of the Jewish Battalions in the same month were welcomed, but the perceived lack of enforcement of either - as thousands of Jewish men remained visible on East London streets - confirmed local suspicions that the Government was pandering to Jewish interests.³⁵² The FJPC held numerous public meetings throughout July to protest the decision to pass the Military Convention with Russia, leading the *Observer* to comment: 'it is quite clear our "guests" intend to make the administration of the new Act as difficult and uncertain as possible'.³⁵³

Just before Yom Kippur on Saturday 23 September 1917, in an otherwise unassuming corner of the East London Borough of Bethnal Green, a pub fight between a Russian Jew and an English soldier rapidly turned into a serious altercation between rival Jewish and English groups. Tensions escalated further on the Sunday as the two contingents reconvened to continue the dispute. According to the initial police report: 'A crowd, numbering some 5,000 persons - a large proportion being women and children - quickly assembled, and took sides with the disputants. The Jewish element were outnumbered, and retired indoors to their residences in Blythe and Teesdale Streets... almost exclusively

³⁴⁹ *The Times* 28 February 1917

³⁵⁰ *Ibid*

³⁵¹ Bush, *East London Jews War*. 'The fact that so many leading figures in East London public life felt impelled to speak of the Jews in terms of open prejudice and hatred proves that the East London Observer was no isolated anti-Semitic voice'. p.153

³⁵² Watts, *The Jewish Legion*, p.98

³⁵³ *ELO*, 28 July 1917. For a discussion of the FJPC meetings see Lipman, *A history of the Jews in Britain*. pp.144-145

occupied by Russian Jews engaged in the tailoring trades'.³⁵⁴ Referred to by Charles Booth as a 'Jewish Island',³⁵⁵ Blythe and Teesdale Streets represented the largest concentration of Jewish tailors and their families outside of Brick Lane and the Aldgate area, despite Jews making up no more than 25% and probably as little as 5% of the population of Bethnal Green (compared to 75-95% in Brick Lane and the surrounding streets).³⁵⁶ Running battles between Jews and non-Jews for control of East London's streets had been a recurrent if small-scale feature of the area since the beginning of the mass immigration of Eastern European Jews in the 1880s.

Attacks on the Jewish residents of Blyth and Teesdale Streets continued late into the night and the following day, one eyewitness reporting 'All sorts of weapons were used - bars of irons, flat irons, logs of wood, and pistols'.³⁵⁷ The *Jewish Chronicle* reported that dozens of Jewish shops were looted and vandalised, and hundreds of Jews seriously assaulted.³⁵⁸ This does not match the police report that listed '30 panes of glass broken in 8 houses on the two days (19 panes in one house, 11 in the other seven houses' and only one case of assault 'Abraham Cohen, age 22 years, British subject, tailor, of 32 Kerbella Street, Bethnal Green, who sustained two cuts on his head (not serious)'.³⁵⁹ As has been seen, tensions between Jews and non-Jews escalated in the area throughout the spring and summer of 1917, revolving around the issue of Russian Jewish non-enlistment into the British Army and the profits accrued by Jewish tailors in the 'Khaki Boom'.

Yet when the flames burst, they were not lit by the failure of another Jewish recruitment drive or a demonstration by the Foreign Jews Protection Committee, but a pub fight between a Russian Jew and an English soldier that rapidly saw 5,000 protagonists occupying the narrow streets behind Old

³⁵⁴PRO HO 45/10822/318095/478, 'Anti-Jewish Demonstration', Report of Superintendent J.Best, Hackney Police Station, J Division, 24 September 1917

³⁵⁵ Cited in Cherry, *London: East*, p.594

³⁵⁶ This is in contrast to Brick lane and the South Shields area, where Jews made up between 75% and 95% of the population, cited in 'Bethnal Green: Building and Social Conditions from 1876 to 1914', in T F T Baker (ed.) *A History of the County of Middlesex: Volume 11, Stepney, Bethnal Green*, (London, 1998), pp. 126-132 <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=22752>

³⁵⁷ ELO, 29 September 1917

³⁵⁸ JC, September 1917

³⁵⁹ PRO HO 45/10822/318095/478

Bethnal Green Road - the petrified Jewish inhabitants of Blythe and Teesdale preparing to face another Kishinev or Odessa. Despite the frenzied state of the crowd, the main victims of the violence were the friable window panes of the Jewish tenements spread across the two streets. The rival groups that clashed violently over the weekend returned to their tailoring workshops, market stalls and pubs on the Monday with relations normalising to the usual war strained levels.

The violence witnessed in Bethnal Green was not the first occurrence of wartime tensions bubbling over into sporadic violence on the streets of London. The rioting that followed in the wake of the *Lusitania* sinking in May 1915 saw far greater destruction of Jewish homes and businesses than the events of two years later, the majority of Jewish victims in this case being the mistaken victims of the Germanophobic mob as previously discussed.³⁶⁰ A heavy-handed police raid on the FJPC in May 1917 caused widespread anger amongst the Jewish East End. *The Women's Dreadnought* investigated the incident and concluded: 'Yes, this is the first British anti-Semitic pogrom: let us hope that we never see another, for such customs once started are apt to grow more cruel and violent.'³⁶¹ Outside of London, shortly before the outbreak of war the Jewish community of Tregodor in Wales became the victims of violent attacks by their Welsh neighbours over religious and commercial differences in the community in 1911, and in Leeds several thousand English vigilantes ransacked Jewish streets over a few days in June 1917.³⁶²

The violence in Leeds, over the weekend of 3 & 4 June, closely matches the circumstances of the later trouble in East London. An initially small but heated argument between Jews and non-Jews escalated into widespread violence and destruction of Jewish businesses. The attacks were motivated predominantly by the resentment felt by English residents caused by the non-enlistment of Russian Jews of military age in the Leeds area. The majority of perpetrators were young - none of those arrested by Yorkshire Police were over 25 years of

³⁶⁰ See Panayi, *The Enemy in our Midst*

³⁶¹ *Women's Dreadnought*, 26 May 1917

³⁶² See Colin Holmes, 'The Tredegar Riots of 1911' *Welsh History Review*, vol. 11, December 1982 and Geoffrey Alderman, 'The anti-Jewish riots of August 1911 in South Wales: a response' *Welsh History Review*, vol. 20 June 1991

age. Writing on the topic of the Leeds disturbances under his *Jewish Chronicle* pseudonym 'Mentor', Leo Greenberg condemned the violence: 'the main fact to be borne in mind is that the riots were caused by the antipathetic sentiment harboured by non-Jews towards Jews. The importance of appreciating the root cause of the trouble that occurred at Leeds, and my reason for insisting upon it, resides in the fact that an identical condition is to be found in other centres inhabited by large numbers of Jews. We know it exists in the East End of London, and the present writer can say that he has found it to be prevalent at Manchester, at Glasgow, and at Cardiff, to name three places, he has within the last few days, visited. In each case there are various differences due to local nuances, but the root mischief is always present.'³⁶³ Returning to the topic of Leeds in his condemnation of the Bethnal Green violence, Greenberg commented: 'The "raid" on Jews in the East End the other day was due au fond to the same cause as the one at Leeds.'³⁶⁴

The German press somehow got hold of the story and painted the Bethnal Green disturbances as a pogrom damaging to British interests, leading to a strong refutation from the Commissioner of Police: 'The whole incident was nothing more than a street brawl. There was nothing in the way approaching a riot or pogrom, anti-Semitic or other'.³⁶⁵ This did not prevent the usually restrained *Jewish Chronicle* from mimicking language used in commentaries on Tsarist pogroms against Jews, pointedly referring to the disturbances as a "raid" on Jews in the East End'.³⁶⁶ Without specific proof to suppose a fabrication of the evidence on the part of the police (although their handling of the situation appears to have been less than exemplary), it must be supposed that the physical damage was indeed less than that reported in the Jewish and local press. The characterisation of the events of September 1917 as a riot - bordering on a pogrom - is therefore curious. The great number of people involved - variously reported as between 3,000 and 5,000 - and the involvement of women and children imply that it was a more substantial movement than the street brawl implied by the police, and reports equated what happened in East

³⁶³ *JC*, September 1917- Mentor commentary repeated from June

³⁶⁴ *ibid*

³⁶⁵ PRO HO 45/10810/311932/56 Anti-Semitic riots in London and Leeds, 24 October 1917

³⁶⁶ *JC*, 27 September 1917

London with the larger anti-Jewish disturbances that occurred in Leeds earlier in the summer.³⁶⁷

A week after the conference in February, the Mayor of Bethnal Green was quoted saying: 'A mother heard of the death of her son or husband. Her tears began to flow, and while the bereavement was fresh in her memory she went to the door and found youngsters- principally from Russia - exempt from national duty... unless something was done the women would take the matter up in their district if the men did not'.³⁶⁸ Whilst this specific anecdote is perhaps an exaggeration of the situation from a known mischief maker,³⁶⁹ the involvement of women and children in the dispute, noted in the police report, reveals the level of community agitation regarding the issue. *The Times* reported that 'The average age of the rioters (who included many off duty servicemen) was much higher than in the Leeds outrage.'³⁷⁰ This was not another gang fight between Jewish and English youths and the fact that the victims were mainly Russian Jewish tailors is consistent with the animosity towards the tailoring trade since the start of the war.

Local press reports of both the Leeds and Bethnal Green disturbances focus on the provocation of English soldiers by Jews as a precursor to violence. In the case of Bethnal Green, it was reported the fighting began after a Russian Jew accused a wounded English soldier of being a fool for enlisting.³⁷¹ Local sentiment interpreted as unanswered the call for 'equal sacrifice' from the Jewish community vociferously delivered at the Conference in February. By failing to defend the interests of the state through enlistment Russian Jews had, when seen from this perspective, set themselves up as 'outsiders' within the nation and as dangerous competitors to British workers. This would cause further tensions upon the cessation of hostilities, when returning English

³⁶⁷ *Yorkshire Evening News*, 5 June 1917 cited in Englander, *History of Jewish Immigrants*, pp.294-296

³⁶⁸ Interview with the *ELO*, reprinted in *The Times* 3 March 1917

³⁶⁹ William John Lewis, a regular and vocal censurer of the borough's alien contingent during his six consecutive terms as mayor between 1913-1919, also happened to be the commanding officer of the 5th County of London Volunteer Regiment, implying a powerful personal incentive to see the recruitment of Russian Jews into local regiments)
http://london.wikia.com/wiki/William_John_Lewis

³⁷⁰ *The Times* 25 September 1917.

³⁷¹ *JC*, 28 September 1917. For account of this see Homes, *John Bull's Island*, p.105

soldiers found themselves pushed out of several key East End industries. This has been identified as the legacy of the events of Bethnal Green in September 1917, as the tipping point for anti-alien sentiment transforming into outright violence, however short-lived.³⁷² However, in assessing the significance and legacy of these events, some sense must be made of the contentious and often contradictory reports surrounding it and the discrepancy between contemporary accounts and the subsequent position it has assumed within the history of British Jewry.

The events of September 23-24 1917 in Bethnal Green have drawn divergent conclusions from academics examining British Jewry in the 20th Century, although few have dwelt on the disturbances in depth.³⁷³ David Cesarani argues that the 'press and openly anti-Semitic journals' influenced 'the physical violence against Jews that occurred in Bethnal Green'.³⁷⁴ More recently, Anthony Julius charged the event with having 'demonstrated the marginal status of East End Jewry'.³⁷⁵ Dan Tilles equates Bethnal Green with the organised anti-Jewish attacks and marches witnessed in the 1930s led by Oswald Mosley's fascists,³⁷⁶ and it has also been labelled a precursor to the Battle of Cable Street in 1936 by Jehuda Reinharz.³⁷⁷ More improbably, it has been cited in a recent biography of Adolf Hitler in WW1, compared negatively to the benign treatment of Imperial Germany's Jewish population during the

³⁷² Sascha Auerbach, 'Negotiating Nationalism: Jewish Conscription and Russian Repatriation in London's East End, 1916–1918', *Journal of British Studies* Vol. 46, No. 3 (July 2007) P.619

³⁷³ For accounts of the riot, see Geoffrey Alderman and Colin Holmes, *Outsiders & Outcasts: Essays in Honour of William J. Fishman* (Duckworth, London 1993), p.42. Gemma Romain, *Connecting Histories: A Comparative Exploration of African-Caribbean and Jewish History and Memory in Modern Britain*, (Kegan Paul, London 2006) p.118. For a police perspective see Clive Emsley and Barbara Weinberger (Eds.) *Policing Western Europe: Politics, Professionalism, and Public Order, 1850-1940* (Greenwood Press, London 1991), p.114

³⁷⁴ Cesarani, *Embattled Minority*, p.62

³⁷⁵ Anthony Julius, *Trials of Diaspora: A History of Anti-Semitism in England* (Oxford University Press, Oxford 2010), p.286

³⁷⁶ Dan Tilles, *British Fascist antisemitism and Jewish Responses, 1932-40* (Bloomsbury, London 2015), p.19

³⁷⁷ Jehuda Reinharz (Ed.), *Living with Anti-Semitism: Modern Jewish Responses* (Published for Brandeis University Press by University Press of New England, London 1987), p.91

war.³⁷⁸ How did an incident described in the official police report as ‘no more than a street brawl’ and ‘nothing in any way approaching a riot or pogrom, anti-Semitic or other’, come to occupy a significant place in the timeline of Jewish-Gentile relations in the metropolis?

There was one notable example of antisemitic rhetoric used by the perpetrators of the event - a 16 year old youth who became the only arrest from the incident as detailed by the police report: ‘This youth, seeing several men of Jewish appearance passing, said to some companions “There’s another gang of f-----g Jews” and ran towards them, when he was at once taken into custody’.³⁷⁹ Both the *East London Observer* and the *Advertiser* fumed at the supposed provocation of Jewish youths in starting the violence - conjecturing it was the long term result of immigrant Jewish failure to reciprocate their host nation’s hospitality through enlistment - but they also condemned the resulting violence forcefully.³⁸⁰ The *Jewish Chronicle* stated the serious violence witnessed on the Sunday afternoon ‘seemed to have been organised’.³⁸¹ However, it is hard to accept this assertion. Both the police reports and eyewitness statements attest to the sporadic nature of the unfolding events, and despite the significant unrest caused by the Russian conscription controversy and economic competition, the war did not see any emergence of organised anti-immigrant or anti-Jewish groups such as those witnessed in the interwar years.³⁸²

That the victims of the violence were Jews, and that the cause of the violence was economic jealousy, would imply an antisemitic event. The *Jewish Chronicle* was unequivocal in its belief that a particular and specific hatred of Jews was driving the violence: ‘We are wont to call this anti-Semitism... A mere dislike, without reason and without sense, just sheer prejudice, is the root of the trouble here, as it is the root of the trouble with the hooligans in Leeds, or the roughs in

³⁷⁸ See Weber, Thomas. *Hitler's First War: Adolf Hitler, the Men of the List Regiment, and the First World War* (OUP Oxford 2011)

³⁷⁹ PRO HO 45/10810/311932/56

³⁸⁰ ELO, 30th September 1917, ELA, 1st October 1917

³⁸¹ JC, 28th September 1917, p.8

³⁸² The British Brothers League- the leading anti-immigration group in the East End- was formed pre-war in 1902, and was broadly against all immigrants’ incursions into traditional English working class spheres, rather than a group characterised by a particular and specific hatred of Jews.

Bethnal Green.³⁸³ However, the events of September 1917 can more rightly be identified as the results of economic xenophobia against a competing minority group exploiting a deregulated market. This mirrored previous local clashes against French Huguenot weavers migrating into the East End in the 17th Century, Irish immigrants in the 1840s and 1850s, and subsequently in less extreme form in concerns over the saturation of the East End Labour market following successive waves of migration from Bangladesh in the 1960s and 1970s. In a comparative assessment of anti-Irish riots in London during the 18th Century, John Marriot has written 'In East London – both then, and in subsequent episodes such as Jewish immigration – religious antagonisms were invoked at times of more fundamental work-based tensions, serving to complicate the picture'.³⁸⁴

Leeds and East London were the principle urban areas for Russian Jewish settlement between 1881 and 1905, and it has been suggested by Colin Holmes that wartime violence to Jews was mostly limited to these two urban centres due to the unresolved complications of immigration into both areas in the era before the outbreak of war. The violence of 1917 was partly the 'working out' process of the earlier process of immigration.³⁸⁵ This is mostly accurate, and as discussed in the first section of this chapter the wartime animosity between Jews and non-Jews stood on a platform of mutual mistrust and misunderstandings associated with the generation before 1914. Tony Kushner has extrapolated that the riots were an indication of a 'cultural exclusivity among non-Jewish East Enders' that was exacerbated by wartime hardships and shortages.³⁸⁶ However, the timing and socio-political context of the 1917 violence against Jews in both Leeds and Bethnal Green indicate that the disturbances were war-specific reactions rather than primarily the result of long-term friction. The violence was a sporadic flash that coincided with the worst shortages on the Home Front of the war and the peak of anti-alien sentiment surrounding the Russian conscription controversy.

³⁸³ 28 September 1917, p.4

³⁸⁴ Marriot, *Beyond the Tower*, p.81

³⁸⁵ Holmes, *Anti-Semitism in British Society*, p.138

³⁸⁶ Tony Kushner, 'Jew and Non-Jew in the East End of London: Towards an Anthropology of 'Everyday' Relations' in Holmes, *Outsiders & Outcasts*, p.42

It is clear that the 'riot' had a significant psychological impact on the East End Jewish community. The events of September 1917 resonated so deeply precisely because of their spontaneous nature. By September, the Jewish Legion scheme and the Anglo-Russian Convention were successfully reducing the number of non-enlisted Jewish men on the streets, and Jewish control of the tailoring industry had slipped as a result. Consequently, to the Jewish residence of Blythe and Teesdale streets barricaded in their own homes by thousands of their English neighbours, there appeared little context for the attacks except hatred. For elder Russian Jews the violence was an uncomfortable echo of the persecution many of them had fled Eastern Europe to avoid. The timing of the violence, just before Yom Kippur, would have given the impression of a premeditated attempt to disrupt the Jewish community at a point of unpreparedness during a religious festival, a frequent tactic in Russian pogroms. It lacked the destruction of property and deaths associated with continental pogroms, but for the victims experiencing the violence first hand, it bore all the trademarks of an antisemitic attack.

Perception of the facts can prove more powerful than their reality in communal and ethnic struggles. Jonathan Dekel-chen has shown that the size and scope of, and official involvement in a pogrom or anti-Jewish incident is less important than how it is reported.³⁸⁷ The often sensationalist and provocative reporting of the event in the local newspapers and the *Jewish Chronicle*, which were 'inclined to publish anecdotal or misleading reports that either incited communal violence or wrongly allocated blame after the event',³⁸⁸ was an important factor in two distinct processes. It convinced a significant number of Russian Jews that the British government was against their continued residence and hastened their return to Russia in accordance with the terms of the military convention (evidence suggests that almost half of the 'Conventionists', as they became known agreed to depart after September 1917).³⁸⁹ Secondly, it accelerated the movement of Jewish interest groups

³⁸⁷ Dekel-Chen, *Anti-Jewish Violence*, Introduction.

³⁸⁸ David Beeston, *Hospitable, Generous England: Anti-Semitic Journalism and Literature in Britain during the First World War and its Aftermath* (Birchwood Publications, Derbyshire 2013), p.72

³⁸⁹ See Kadish, *Bolsheviks and British Jews*. 2600 returned after 30 September out of a total of 5898, p.211 See also, Auerbach, *Negotiating Nationalism*

(inspired by the model of the FJPC) into developing ties with local East End Labour organisations. Economic and social security for the Jewish East End and the prevention of further violence such as seen in Bethnal Green could only be achieved by improving ties with English Labour interests and the active involvement in East End politics of the Jewish community.

Conclusion

The war exacerbated underlying economic and ethnic tensions between Jews and non-Jews in the East End that had been evident since large scale Jewish immigration into the area began in the 1880s. The 'Khaki Boom' contributed to the intensification of ill feeling, with the entrenchment of the myth that Jewish tailors were profiting from the war in the absence of their English competitors patriotically serving on the front line. Significantly, the events of Bethnal Green in 1917 invoked for the first time, both the reality and implication of violence in relations between Jews and non-Jews which defined inter-communal tensions between the wars. Much of the wartime animosity was driven by the virulence of the local press - in particular the *East London Observer* - which demonised Jewish applicants for military exemption and missed few opportunities to accuse Jews of cowardice during air raids.

Yet a broader perspective of the war reveals a less destructive influence on Jewish/non-Jew relations in the predominantly working class East End of London. The sensationalism of the East End press exaggerated the impression of hostility between Jews and non-Jews in East London, masking the everyday acts of co-operation and kindness that characterised Jewish/non-Jewish relations as much as mutual animosity during the war years. This centred on the concept of shared struggle, revealed in the Jewish Battalion story and the indiscriminate dangers of bombing and starvation, greater Jewish involvement in and membership of trade unions, and the cessation of immigration after 1914.

This was the paradox of the Jewish experience of 1914-1918. The same set of factors - be it economic competition, enlistment, rationing or air raids - both heightened and eased tension between Jews and the wider London community. It is therefore misleading to disproportionately focus on a single event such as the Bethnal Green riot in 1917 when seeking to form a greater understanding of the evolving set of relations between Jews and non-Jews, immigrant Jews and integrated Jews, during the First World War and the decades immediately before and after it.

CHAPTER TWO

West End Jewry and the Great War: Patriotism Under Fire

Introduction

Chapter one assessed the wartime experiences of a transitional immigrant community under pressure to engage in the dominant nation's war effort. This chapter will use as its subject London's more established West End Jewish population to assess how anglicised, emancipated and patriotic English Jews were affected by the forces of British nationalism during the war. This chapter will focus on the national scrutiny of established Jewry's patriotism as a historic minority community expected to oblige the 'privilege' of emancipation through patriotic sacrifice. Sacrifice in this sense was double layered; on the Home Front the war presented several unpalatable scenarios where established Jewry sacrificed purely Jewish concerns at the expense of British interests. On the front line, the service and sacrifice of English Jewish soldiers represented the 'shield of Patriotism' of the community against accusations of disloyalty. The pressure placed on West End Jewry by the forces of British nationalism between 1881-1918 fostered attempts to eradicate Jewish differentness within the public sphere, and the attempts to control, condemn and distance themselves from the unpatriotic actions of immigrant Jews to a large extent defined established Jewry's response to the war.

Britain's declaration of war on Germany in August 1914 effectively upgraded the ambiguous set of mutually beneficial geopolitical agreements reached with France (1904) and Russia (1907) into formal military alliances. The new alliance with Russia in particular would place the communal leaders of London Jewry in a conundrum. Since 1907 a highly publicised campaign, led primarily by elements within the Jewish London elite, focused on reversing the British commitments and political attachment to Russia implicit in the territorial and trade negotiations between the two countries made that year. Beginning in 1912 the *Jewish Chronicle* published a supplementary paper written by Lucien Wolf entitled 'Darkest Russia' detailing the harrowing anti-Jewish atrocities of the Tsarist regime.³⁹⁰ Prominent London Jews such as Nathan Rothschild, Samuel Montagu and Nathan Adler lobbied for British action against Russia (citing the horrors of the Kishinev pogrom of 1903³⁹¹) and institutions such as the Board of Deputies and the Anglo-Jewish Association established investigative committees to confirm and denounce Russian treatment of its Jewish citizens.³⁹² The Tsarist government's persecution of their Jewish population was an issue that largely united an often fractious Anglo-Jewish community.

As late as 31 July 1914, the *Jewish Chronicle* protested against the prospect of 'spilling blood or the squandering of British resources in order that the Slavs may maintain their position against the Teutons and an effete and barbarous autocracy be sustained on a tottering throne.'³⁹³ Alliance with the historic enemy therefore caused much embarrassment, not least for the Editor of the

³⁹⁰ Lucien Wolf, *Darkest Russia: A Weekly Record of the Struggle for Freedom*, JC, Jan. 1912-1914. *Darkest Russia* was a weekly bulletin on the state of Russian affairs and the plight of its Jewish subjects, and was often used by Wolf to criticise the entente and warn against further diplomatic and political concessions to the Tsarist state. For further analysis of Wolf and *Darkest Russia*, see Mark Levene, *War, Jews, and the New Europe: The Diplomacy of Lucien Wolf 1914-1919* (Oxford University Press, Oxford 1992), p.31

³⁹¹ For analysis on the nature, frequency and state involvement of Russian Pogroms, see Dekel-Chen, *Anti-Jewish Violence*, pp. 1-19

³⁹² For West End Jewry's response to Kishinev see Ben Gidley, 'The Ghosts of Kishinev in the East End: Responses to a Pogrom in the Jewish London of 1903' in Etain Bar-Yosef, & Nadia Valman (eds.), *'The Jew' in Late-Victorian and Edwardian Culture: Between the East End and East Africa*. Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke 2009. pp.98-113 See also Sam Johnson, *Pogroms, Peasants Jews: Britain and East Europe's 'Jewish Question', 1867-1925* (Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke 2011), pp.77-95, as well as this more specific article 'Making or Breaking the Silence? British Jews and Anglo-Jewish Relief, 1914-1917' *Modern Judaism*, 30 (2010) p.3

³⁹³ JC, 31 July 1914

Jewish Chronicle Leo Greenberg, forced to perform a quick volte-face and a cessation of Wolf's supplement.³⁹⁴ This incident characterised the difficulties English Jews faced during the war; that any issue requiring a definitive communal response regarding a Jewish matter would, dependent on the choice, be accompanied with the accusation of insufficient British patriotism or the callous abandonment of a Jewish cause. The Jewish elite's responses to the poverty of immigrant Jews in the early weeks of the war, the issue of the Russian Jewish conscription crisis, and – as will be seen in this chapter – the issue of the arrest of alien Jews after the Aliens Act of August 1914 are cases in point. With regards to the Anglo-Russian alliance, the acceptance of an intolerable friendship with the hated enemy accompanied the uncomfortable reality that the community's past behaviour in relation to the Russian entente now represented the weak link in West End Jewry's supreme commitment to England's cause.³⁹⁵

The majority of accounts detailing the experiences of London Jews during the First World War focus on the immigrant Jewish community, with the involvement of English Jews an intrinsic but unseparated element of this narrative. One study that attempted to explore primarily the latter perspective is David Cesarani's 1989 study, *An Embattled Minority: The Jews of Britain during the First World War*. Cesarani attempts to show the upheaval of the four years of war and the controversy created by the Russian Jewish crisis from the perspective of the Jewish elite: the institutions of established Jewry desperately attempting to quell the flames of indignant British chauvinism fanned by the indifference of the Jewish East End that threatened to engulf the entire British Jewish community. Cesarani concluded that the War 'engendered a serious deterioration in the position of the Jews in British society', caused both by the antisemitism of British society and the fact 'British Jews were under enormous pressure to show that they were loyal citizens'.³⁹⁶ This view has enjoyed a healthy longevity in the years since 1989. Mark Levene (1992) has argued that during the War 'Wealthy Anglo-Jews from the West End with foreign-sounding

³⁹⁴ Max Beloff, *Lucien Wolf and the Anglo-Russian Entente 1907-1914* (The Jewish Historical Society of England, London 1951), p.36

³⁹⁵ Levene, *War, Jews, and the New Europe*, p.30

³⁹⁶ Cesarani, *Embattled Minority*, pp.61-62

names, found themselves obvious targets for popular suspicion and popular wrath'.³⁹⁷ More recently, Paul Ward (2009), a historian of British patriotism, has stated that 'Jewish men were under severe pressure to join the army to "prove" that they were Britons first and Jews second'.³⁹⁸ There is some truth to this school of thinking; the pre-war anti-alien movements, a jingoistic national press and the grinding social stresses of total war after 1916 led to an increased pressure and attention on the activity of English Jews. As discussed in chapter one however, there were few examples of overt anti-Jewish prejudice during the war – as one recent history of London in the war has stated, 'stone throwing over one weekend in a tiny corner of east London [was] as bad as things got in terms of communal violence'.³⁹⁹ Mark Levene states the jingoism of August 1914 led to English Jews 'trumpeting one's Britishness whilst belittling one's ethnicity or religiosity'.⁴⁰⁰ Whilst certainly motivated by the very real attention of negative British public opinion, this chapter will argue that an element of this pressure that Ward, Cesarani and others have identified for British Jews to prove themselves in the war was the product of intense attempts on behalf of London Jews to anglicise their immigrant co-religionists during the period 1880-1914. This, among other outcomes, gradually transformed the concept of national and religious allegiance for Jews in Britain as a whole.

This chapter will examine the First World War experiences of English-born Jews in the context of British patriotism and national identity. It will assess the West End Jewish response to the war in comparison to the wider national reaction, and will seek to answer why English Jews felt pressured to demonstrate a heightened level of patriotism that in statistical terms outstripped the national response.⁴⁰¹ To answer this, a wider discussion of warfare and British society and will be included to examine the effects of intermittent warfare during this period on British concepts of imperialism and patriotism, in order to assess how an encroaching militarism within British society impacted on

³⁹⁷ Levene, *War, Jews, and the New Europe*, p.28

³⁹⁸ Paul Ward, *Britishness since 1870* (Routledge, London 2004), p.115

³⁹⁹ White, *Zeppelin Nights*, p.89

⁴⁰⁰ Levene, *War, Jews and the New Europe*, p.28

⁴⁰¹ The total number of Jewish who served in the British armed forces during World War One totalled 41,500. This equated to 13.8 per cent of British Jewry, a proportion greater than that of the general British population which totalled only 11.5 per cent. See Alderman, *British Jewry*, p.233

established Jewry. Were the Jewish displays of patriotism in August 1914 driven by the pressurised environment created by the militarisation of British society in the Edwardian era? Britain was at war for less than seven of the 19 years spanning the beginning of the Boer war and the signing of the Armistice with Germany in November 1918. The impact and implications of the shorter, far-flung imperial war in South Africa and the apocalyptic conflict for national survival against the Central powers between 1914-1918 were however to have a disproportionate effect on the transformation of British society and the development of a national identity, defined not so much by what Britishness stood for, but what it didn't. This resulted in increased pressure on groups defined as being on the margins of mainstream society – particularly radicals and members of the far left but also Britain's minorities – to demonstrate unequivocally their loyalty to Britain and the empire. It will be argued here that English Jews were under increasing scrutiny to demonstrate their loyalty to both nation and empire during this period of heightened focus regarding the nature of British patriotism, and it was this that partially drove the elevated patriotic displays of established Jewry in August 1914.

The chapter will also assess the experience of English Jewish soldiers serving in the British Army in the years 1914-1918. English Jew's motivations for volunteering and the frequency and severity of antisemitism suffered by Jewish troops in the trenches will be examined. It will be shown that whilst antisemitism occurred regularly on an individual level, there is insufficient evidence to demonstrate endemic or institutional antisemitism in the British Army during the First World War. However, unsavoury and highly public incidents, such as the refusal to enlist Jewish volunteers at a recruiting depot in Hackney in October 1914, transcended this reality and were enough to entrench a general perception of prejudice towards Jewish soldiers that discouraged enlistment, particularly from immigrant Jews as the war progressed. The war also placed serious strain on the ability of Jews serving in the British Army to uphold their religious commitments. Jewish chaplains were not assigned to individual regiments, unlike their Christian counterparts, with only the roaming Chief Reverend Michael Adler to organise Jewish services for the majority of the conflict. Achieving leave or the relinquishing of military duties

for religious festivals was notoriously difficult for Jewish soldiers, and where this was granted, inadvertently spread accusations of special treatment. Providing Jewish soldiers – thinly spread out amongst the various battalions of the British Army – with kosher food proved a logistical impossibility. The war contributed to a significant decline in the religiosity of young Jewish males, and the households they returned to after the war.

Finally, the chapter will consider the impact of the Balfour Declaration specifically, and the growth of political Zionism more broadly, on the internal politics of West End Jewry. The chapter will ask why the Britain government sought to tie British geopolitical concerns in the Middle East to the mast of Zionism at such a critical stage of the war in 1917. Having assessed the motivations of the British government for aligning with Zionism, the chapter will examine how the wartime growth of political Zionism transformed Anglo-Jewish politics and polarised opinions within the London Jewish elite. Prior to 1914 British Zionism as a political entity was weak, divided and lacking direction. Only a small group of intellectuals associated with Chaim Weizmann and influential individuals such as Leo Greenberg (editor of the *Jewish Chronicle*) were significant representatives of Zionism within Anglo-Jewry prior to 1914. However, the chaos of the war years brought new opportunities for British Zionists. The ascension of the Zionist sympathiser Lloyd George to the premiership in December 1916 and the British invasion of Palestine the following March, made the establishment of a Jewish homeland, through the acquiescence of Britain, suddenly a startlingly real possibility.⁴⁰² Weizmann and other Zionist intellectuals attempted to influence the British government as to their understanding of the strength and position of Zionism within the Jewish community. These negotiations eventually bore fruit in November 1917 with the public declaration of British support for a Jewish homeland in Palestine. However, for many English Jews the cause of Jewish nationalism represented an unwanted accentuation of Jewish differentness at a time when the community craved anonymity: the Russian Jewish conscription crisis peaked in 1917. The deliverance of Balfour's declaration to the symbolic head of British Jewry, Lord Rothschild, appeared to establish the quest for a Jewish homeland

⁴⁰² Alderman, *British Jewry*, p.226

in Palestine as a war aim for established Jewry, therefore diminishing the British patriotism the community had proudly displayed since 1914. For the majority of the more acculturated elite of British Jewry and the patriotic volunteers of the rank and file of Jewish youth serving in the trenches, Zionism was the antithesis of what British Jews were fighting for. Ultimately, the growth of political Zionism in Britain during the First World War split established Jewry and further deteriorated the ability of the community to find consensus on non-Zionist Jewish matters.

Overall, the war was far from the wholly negative experience for established Jewry as has often been portrayed. English Jewish soldiers shared in the collective glory of victory in 1918, and many prospered in the improved position of Britain's middle class professions in the interwar period.⁴⁰³ Most visibly, Jewish Zionists such as Weizmann and Greenberg forged important political links within Whitehall that not only secured the Balfour Declaration of November 1917 but ensured crucial political protection for the Jewish community in the interwar period. They were far from the gullible fools portrayed by Mark Levene in his assessment of the Balfour Declaration.⁴⁰⁴ That said, the war would test established Jewry's fragile pre-war cohesion. It would expose the true limitations of its control of East London Jewry and the failure of the initiatives to integrate them into the fabric of the nation. The patriotism of the opening weeks of the war would be tested by the horrific sacrifice of Jewish youths in Flanders field, and ultimately hollowed by the continued suspicion of Jewish commitment to the war effort by the British public and press. For British Jews, whose patriotism and sacrifice for Britain's cause matched that of the nation as a whole, the years 1914 to 1918 revealed the extent to which the actions of the community were viewed through the prism of their status as a privileged but distinct minority. As a result, British Jews felt pressured to display their loyalty as British citizens, whilst enduring consistent accusations that the community was putting Jewish interests before national ones. The perception of split loyalties was raised in particular over Anglo-Jewry's response to the Russian

⁴⁰³ Koshar, *Splintered Classes*, pp. 125-127

⁴⁰⁴ Levene, *The Balfour Declaration*, pp.54-77

Jewish conscription crisis and the polarising issue of political Zionism. Conversely, any perceived failures to defend the rights of Russian Jews both at home and under Tsarist control were loudly condemned by those who felt Anglo-Jewry was pandering to Government and public opinion at the expense of their co-religionists. This chapter will seek to show that West End Jewry experienced a peculiarly troublesome war – full of the collective strains and horrors afflicting British society as a whole and sharing the trials and tribulations experienced by the Jewish East End – yet isolated from both.

X. British Patriotism, War and West End Jewry 1899-1914

For English Jews, the second Anglo-Boer war (1899-1902) mirrored later experiences of the First World War in several important respects. For the first time, Jews volunteered for Army life in large numbers, inadvertently broadening the debate amongst both Jewish and Gentile intellectuals as to the suitability and worth of Jews as soldiers. Press accusations of Jewish sympathy and financial collusion with the enemy also muddled the community's display of a patriotic front. Like the situation of 1914-1918, Anglo-Jewry found itself peculiarly at the forefront of events at a time when immigration issues meant communal leaders craved reduced visibility.

The Boer war illuminated the Imperial cracks and provided an array of responses to the question of the national character of Britain and the British. Breaking out with a flood of patriotic fervour on 11 October, *The Times* reported the feeling of the City a few days later: 'nothing could possibly have surpassed the enthusiasm of the meeting within the Guildhall "in support of the South African policy of Her Majesty's Government"'.⁴⁰⁵ A spectacular series of defeats during 'Black Week' and the muddled conclusion to the war that saw 400,000 British troops struggle to defeat a Boer force that never exceeded 90,000, damaged the British military reputation built up through a succession of small

⁴⁰⁵ *The Times*, 17 October 1899 p.12, 'The City and the War'

Imperial wars during the preceding decades.⁴⁰⁶ The war had several important consequences. The popular enthusiasm aroused by such events as the relief of the siege of Mafeking, the defeat of the regular Boer forces and the volunteer movement for active services in the war can be seen as evidence of a developing militancy in British society which would to an extent characterise Edwardian society in the coming decade. In the realm of politics, the Unionists successfully employed patriotic rhetoric to identify themselves with the recent victories over the Boers, skilfully identifying their Liberal opponents symbolically with the Boer enemy (if only through their want of enthusiasm for an expensive Imperial entanglement) to win a resounding victory in the general election in 1900.⁴⁰⁷

British discourse on the unsuitability of Jews as soldiers was often animated by the perceived poor performance of Jews serving in the Russian Army. The journalist E J Dillon informed his readers that: 'Summoned as recruits to the colours [in Russia], a large proportion of [Jews] shirk their duty and abscond. Enlisted in the regiments they mutilate themselves or feign illness. On the battlefield they surrender themselves.'⁴⁰⁸ Despite the obvious context of the harshness of the Russian military system, such negative conjectures dominated turn of the century discussion of Jews as soldiers and struck at the heart of Anglo-Jewry's anxiety about its own self-image and the Jewish role and place in the nation.⁴⁰⁹ However, such concerns can be set within the context of wider debates emerging from the conflict regarding the physical wellbeing of Britain, not simply the country's external international standing but the physical health of the British populace. More than 10,000 volunteers enlisted for service during the bleak winter of 1899-1900. W.J. Reader cites a contemporary account to explain the movement: 'the Volunteers impelled by the lust of glory and the love of country, stepped to the front'.⁴¹⁰ Volunteerism and the reasons behind it will be discussed in greater detail with regards to the 1914-1918 conflict, but the

⁴⁰⁶ Adams, *Conscription Controversy*, p.2; p.6

⁴⁰⁷ Paul Readman, 'The Conservative Party, Patriotism, and British Politics: the Case of the General Election of 1900', *The Journal of British Studies*, 40 (2001), p117

⁴⁰⁸ E.J Dillon, 'Foreign Affairs; Emancipation or Disenfranchisement for Russian Jews', *Contemporary Review*, June 1908: pp.759-760. Cited in Sam Johnson, *Pogroms, Peasants and Jews*, p.210

⁴⁰⁹ *ibid*

⁴¹⁰ Cited in Reader, *At Duty's Call*, p.11

more pressing matter arising from the Boer war volunteers was that 40 to 60 per cent of these volunteers were rejected as unfit for military service.⁴¹¹ The poor health, size and malnutrition of the volunteers, mainly from the London area, shocked a middle class that felt 'national vigour was measurable in population growth, in immigration statistics, in averages of height and weight and productivity'.⁴¹²

The denigration of the Jewish soldier by Dillon and other critics during the Boer war was countered robustly in the Jewish press. Lucien Wolfe wrote a piece for *The Graphic* attempting to prove the historical veracity of Jewish soldiering,⁴¹³ and the *Jewish Chronicle* published positive reports on Jewish recruitment in Russia to show 'the statement that Jews evade military service is quite unfounded'.⁴¹⁴ The Jewish Lads Brigade sought to alter negative concepts of Jews as physically unfit for soldiering by feeding recruits a diet of 'drill, discipline, and manly sports, such as cricket, football, and athletic exercises'.⁴¹⁵ According to the *Jewish World* such activities would prove Jews were ready to 'take their places as citizens, physically and mentally equipped for the battle of life'.⁴¹⁶ These initiatives appeared to bear fruit as the war in South Africa progressed, with as many as 2,800 Jews serving in the various units of the British Army⁴¹⁷, and the *Jewish Chronicle* proudly relating that Jews of all classes had 'rallied to the Country's call to arms'.⁴¹⁸ The war was popularly supported across the entire spectrum of the Jewish metropolitan community; wild celebrations in Brick Lane marked the relief of Mafeking in May 1900⁴¹⁹, whilst the Westminster School-educated Henry Myer recalled as a child during the war having 'a large map of South Africa, on to which we affixed miniature flags on pins to show the position of the British forces and we wore buttons with

⁴¹¹ Adams, *Conscription Controversy*, p6

⁴¹² Ibid

⁴¹³ *The Graphic*, 23rd December 1893

⁴¹⁴ *JC*, 13 April 1883.

⁴¹⁵ HL Southampton, MS244, JLB, Annual Report, 1 April 1902-30 April 1903, p.10-11 cited in Tananbaum, *Jewish Immigrants*. P.115

⁴¹⁶ *The Jewish World*, 7 December 1900.

⁴¹⁷ Gustav Saron, and Louis Hotz, (Eds), *The Jews in South Africa: a history* (Oxford University Press, Oxford 1955), p 207 See also Tananbaum, *Jewish Immigrants*, p.115. Who quotes 1000 volunteers.

⁴¹⁸ *JC*, 9 February 1900.

⁴¹⁹ *JC*, 25 May 1900

photographs of our favourite generals'.⁴²⁰ A poem written in 1900 by an anonymous Jewish woman captured this spirit of patriotism and joint sacrifice on behalf of Anglo-Jewry:

'Now we Jews, we English Jews, O mother England,

Ask another boon of thee!

Let us share with them the danger and the glory,

Where thy best bravest lead, there let us follow,

O'er the sea!'⁴²¹

Nationally, the popularity and patriotism identified with the war managed to penetrate previous critics and opponents of imperial ambition, most notably Robert Blatchford. As Paul Ward relates, the threat to Britain posed by the war led to the ardent socialist, who had in June 1899 declared 'Our Empire was built on blood, pillage, and chicanery', offering sincere support for Britain's plight in an Imperial war, announcing upon its outbreak 'I am for peace and for international brotherhood. But when England is at war I'm English. I have no politics and no party. I am English'.⁴²² Ward explains this turnaround to an acceptance on the Left that British national identity was tied with Imperialism, and despite the manner of its attainment, when the Empire was at threat so by definition was Britain; Blatchford's support for the war was to him a necessary duty.⁴²³

Despite the profusions of patriotism displayed by the Jewish community during the conflict, Jewish loyalty and commitment to the war was questioned within certain circles of British society from the outset. The fact that many of the major mining magnates in South Africa happened to be Jews led several Liberal and Labour politicians and journalists to claim that the war had been

⁴²⁰ Myer, *Soldiering of Sorts*, p.3

⁴²¹ Reprinted in *Daily News*, 17 September 1917 by G.W.E. Russell under the headline 'The Jewish Regiment', with the explanation 'These exhilarating verses were written by a Jewish lady at the time of the Boer War'.

⁴²² Paul Ward, *Red Flag and Union Jack: England, Patriotism and the British Left, 1881-1924* (the Boydell Press, Woodbridge 1998), p60

⁴²³ Ibid p.61

incited by Jewish capitalists and was being fought for Jewish interests.⁴²⁴ Hilaire Belloc argued that the war had been 'openly and undeniably provoked and promoted by Jewish interests in South Africa'⁴²⁵, and the right wing newspaper *The Justice* railed in even more violent terms in 1899 against 'Jew financiers' as 'gold-greedy ghouls thirsting for blood'.⁴²⁶ British Jews, whose support for the war stemmed from the opportunity to demonstrate their loyalty to Queen and Country, now had to face the accusation that their support was motivated by Jewish greed, not British patriotism.⁴²⁷ Not helping Anglo-Jewry's cause was the highly visible evidence appearing in the accounts of war correspondents of Jewish soldiers, as many as 300 according to some reports, actively fighting for the Boers.⁴²⁸ Such reports were damaging for the community and diminished the performance of Jewish troops enlisted in the British Army, despite the international origin of many of the 'Boerjuds' as they became known.⁴²⁹

However, the emergence of significant opposition to the war in its later bloody and attritional stages casts doubt on the existence of a unified patriotism in Britain at the turn of the century. Phillip Stanhope, who voted against the measure in Parliament to raise funds for the war, in October 1899 declared in a letter to the editor of *The Times* his 'Belief that the deplorable war in which we are now engaged could have been, and should have been, avoided' and that 'true patriotism appears to me to involve other considerations besides pride in our wealth and power'.⁴³⁰ It was this sense that patriotism was not limited to the domain of jingoism that animated the Pro Boers. Opposition was often framed in terms of the danger the war posed to values the British had long held dear: constitutionalism, freedom, fair play and justice. The *ILP News* raged against the threat to these values from the Government's belligerency and urged 'every self-respecting lover of his country to protest with all the power that is in him

⁴²⁴ Bar-Yosuf, *Between the East End and East Africa*, p.1. See also, Claire Hirshfield, 'The Anglo-Boer War and the issue of Jewish Culpability', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 15 (1980), p.622

⁴²⁵ Hilaire Belloc, *The Jews* (Constable and Co Limited, London 1922), p.50

⁴²⁶ *The Justice*, 14 October 1899.

⁴²⁷ Bar-Yosuf, *Between the East End and East Africa*, p.2

⁴²⁸ Saron, *The Jews in South Africa*, p 208

⁴²⁹ Ibid.

⁴³⁰ Phillip Stanhope letter to the editor, *The Times* 30 October 1899

against the atrocious crime which we are apparently about to commit'.⁴³¹ The war produced varied patriotic responses – an undeniable love of country but expressed through opposing concerns for the physical wellbeing of Britain and its Empire, and the moral health of a nation apparently swapping the role of the 'world's policeman' in favour of aggressive expansionism.

Some reports did paint Jewish soldiers in a favourable light, in particular *The Spectator* ran an article under the headline 'Jews as Soldiers' in 1903 which noted 'The deaths among the Jewish soldiers have been, it is said, in excess of their quota. In any event, the bulk of the native-born Jews here have come well to the fore in the recent struggle'.⁴³² However, Keith Surridge has recently hypothesised that the origin of British antisemitism in the army stemmed not from poor opinion of the quality of Jewish troops but from the contempt held for Jewish capitalists amongst the British officer class during the Boer war, many of whom had reached high rank and influential positions within the army by the outbreak of the First World War.⁴³³

XI. Shield of Patriotism: English Jewish Soldiers and the First World War

It can be ascertained that concerns over Jewish loyalty – as well as the fallout from Britain's poor war performance that saw questions over the decline in British martial stock – directly influenced the movement towards the passing of the Aliens Act of 1905. Parallels can be observed between the furore over Jewish capitalists during the Boer war and press accusations against Anglo-Jewry over alleged pro-German sympathies at the outbreak of war in 1914. Then, as in the previous conflict, London-based Jewish financiers were

⁴³¹ *ILP News*, Sept. 1899. cited in Ward, *Red Flag and Union Jack*, p.65

⁴³² *The Spectator*, 3rd January 1903. See Englander, *History of Jewish Immigrants*, p.342

⁴³³ Keith Surridge, 'All you Soldiers are what we call pro-Boer: the military Critique of the South African War, 1879-1901', *History*, 82, October 1997 p.268,. See also Watts, *Jewish Legion*, p.96.

accused of colluding with the enemy. *The Times* journalist Henry Wickham Steed warned his readers of 'the pro-German and pan-German tendencies of Jewish finance', and it was argued by Steed and others that this underpinned Jewish opposition to the Anglo-Russian entente – concern over the treatment of Russian Jewry was merely camouflage.⁴³⁴ Such accusations were given apparent weight by the late appeals for peace talks with Germany undertaken by Lord Rothschild, claiming to speak for the City, which became known only after Germany's invasion of Belgium had swung British opinion from a non-interventionist stance towards a pro-war sentiment.⁴³⁵ As has already been discussed at the beginning of this chapter, *The Jewish Chronicle* was also caught out by the speed of developments, a strongly worded condemnation of the prospect of war with Germany and alliance with Russia on 31 July having to be hastily replaced with a patriotic U-turn in the following edition.⁴³⁶ However, the Jewish community were not alone in being overtaken by events in late July and Early August 1914, and the growing clamour for war that gripped British society had an organic and spontaneous quality that few social commentators managed to predict.

Another important offshoot from the Boer War was the stimulus it provided to pro-conscriptionist campaigners. Victorian society held a deep aversion to the prospect of mass conscript armies, a legacy of the Protectorate regime of Oliver Cromwell. The conscript army was a potent symbol of the authoritarianism consuming the militarised nations of the continent. However, the poor performance of the regular forces during the South African war and the worrying state of affairs in which Britain had been left denuded of all but 17,000 regular troops in the spring of 1900, convinced many that an overhaul of the military system was necessary to provide both Imperial and home defence.⁴³⁷ A concerned correspondent for *The Times* in January 1900 declared 'Depend upon it that in time of pressing danger the present Army system cannot resist

⁴³⁴ Steed, Henry Wickham. *Through Thirty Years, 1892-1922: A Personal Narrative*. Volume 1 (William Heinemann Ltd, London 1924), p.390. See Levene, *War, Jews and the New Europe*, p.25

⁴³⁵ *Ibid* pp.26-27

⁴³⁶ *JC*, 31 July 1914; 7 August 1914

⁴³⁷ Adams, *Conscription Controversy*, p7

the strain', the solution, 'A home army or militia organised, drilled, disciplined, and officered like an ordinary standing army, and recruited on the broad, patriotic principle that England expects every man to do his duty'.⁴³⁸ The National Service League with General Lord Roberts as its president, pushed for compulsory service for young men and provided a platform around which pro-conscriptionist agitators could rally.⁴³⁹ Boasting a membership of 270,000 by the eve of the First World War, Roberts and the League continuously criticised the Conservative and later the Liberals' proposals for a reformation of the Volunteer system that would become the Territorial Army. A bill for compulsory service based on a Swiss system of compulsion was defeated by 123 votes to 103 in the House of Lords in May 1909.⁴⁴⁰ The failure to command significant support in the country and to induce conscription legislation before 1916 to an extent rested on the issue of conscription being one of two competing patriotisms: did true patriotic love of country reside in doing one's duty by sacrificing personal liberty by bearing arms in defence of the nation, or by upholding the cherished freedoms and liberty that were the hallmarks of the British Liberal state?

An aversion to compulsion was identified by pro-conscriptionists as evidence of a lack of patriotism: 'From Paris to Pretoria, and from Archangel to Auckland, the private citizen is under bond to shed his blood for his country; in Great Britain alone he sheds nothing but his money, and pays a body of professional troops to discharge his patriotic duties for him'.⁴⁴¹ The campaign for increased naval spending led by the Navy league under the banner 'We want eight [dreadnoughts], and we won't wait!'⁴⁴² combined with German aggression over Morocco, led many to sympathise with Army reforms as a bulwark to the threat of Germany; evidence of this in a cultural context being the commercial success of William Le Quoux's fictionalised 'The Invasion of 1910', given military credence by advice from Lord Roberts himself.⁴⁴³ However, a lack of working class enthusiasm for compulsory service combined with the scepticism of

⁴³⁸ *The Times* 2 January 1900

⁴³⁹ Adams, *Conscription Controversy*, pp10-11

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid*, pp10-41

⁴⁴¹ Unknown source from 1899 cited in Reader, *Duty's Call*, p.75

⁴⁴² Adams, *Conscription Controversy*, p.38

⁴⁴³ *Ibid* p.34

Parliament effectively blocked the movement; as Reader concludes: 'Compulsory Service never came within the scope of practical politics in pre-1914 Britain. Aversion to it ran wide and deep and, with the English Channel as a moat commanded by the Navy, there was no very obvious reason, in spite of frequent invasion scares, why the voluntary principles should not be applied to defence'.⁴⁴⁴

This reliance on volunteerism was put to the ultimate test of a general European war in August 1914. Although Britain had no formal alliance with France, many in the Liberal Cabinet such as Prime Minister Asquith felt the Staff talks between the countries' military forces meant Britain had a moral obligation to assist France following the declaration of war against her by Germany, and a vested interest in sustaining France's position as a great power.⁴⁴⁵ This was not reason enough for many in a Liberal Government distasteful of expensive foreign wars, especially during the preparation for the implementation of Home Rule in Ireland, and to the wider nation as a whole. The German violation of Belgian neutrality conveniently provided a consensus on which the Government and the country could enter the war united.⁴⁴⁶ Evidence of the national enthusiasm to support Britain on the outbreak of war is far from lacking; the 760,000 volunteers raised ostensibly under the influence of Lord Kitchener in the first two months of war, the suspension of the Suffragette campaign to focus on patriotic activities, compelling if more moderate enlistment in Ireland; but it would be naïve to cite these as examples of selfless patriotic sacrifices. It is true that many who enlisted in the Army after August 1914 were primarily driven by patriotism. Nicoletta Gullace has stated that 'enlisting in the army became the supreme mark of loyalty'.⁴⁴⁷ This loyalty was evident in the highest number of new recruits enlisting in late August and early September during the British retreat from Mons and the possibility of imminent defeat.

⁴⁴⁴ Reader, *Duty's Call*. p.78

⁴⁴⁵ Adams, *Conscription Controversy*, p.50

⁴⁴⁶ Niall Ferguson, *Pity of War*, (Penguin Books, London 1999), pp161-164

⁴⁴⁷ Nicoletta Gullace, *The Blood of Our Sons: Men, Women, and the Renegotiation of British Citizenship during the Great War* (Palgrave, Basingstoke 2002), p.36

Once hostilities had officially commenced, established Jewry wasted little time in displaying a collective patriotism and oneness with Britain's cause. As had happened fifteen years previously with the opening of the Boer War, visible support for the struggle in the form of Union Jacks and patriotic banners quickly adjourned Jewish shops in the West End⁴⁴⁸, whilst the *Jewish Chronicle* went into patriotic overdrive with its famous declaration: 'England has been all she could be to Jews. Jews will be all they can be for England.'⁴⁴⁹ As a comparison this matched the patriotic enthusiasm demonstrated by the Jewish population of Berlin in August 1914, a minority similarly subject to pre-war suspicions of loyalty to the Fatherland and fallout from immigration pressures from co-religionists arriving from the east. Yet for German Jews war provided an opportunity to stand firm with the German nation through sacrifice on the battlefield.⁴⁵⁰ Indeed, as Derek Penslar has noted, military service provided the most powerful manifestation of Jewish allegiance to the state and civil society: 'The uniform was an accoutrement of emancipation, and the battlefield and barracks were sites of assimilation'.⁴⁵¹

The *Jewish Chronicle* reported near the end of August that 'There is every indication that the call to the nation has not, so far as the Jewish community is concerned, by any means fallen on deaf ears. The information appearing in our news columns point to a steady flow of Jews to the colours. In London the recruiting officials testify warmly to Jewish loyalty'.⁴⁵² The obvious pride the *Jewish Chronicle* and other Anglo-Jewish institutions took in the number of Jewish volunteers stemmed in part from a fear of any repeat of the accusations of Jewish self-interest seen during the Boer War. This led specifically to stringent attempts to deny any sectarian behaviour that could be interpreted as Jews putting Jewish interests before national ones. This was articulated openly by the outgoing president of the English Zionist Federation, Sir Francis Montefiore that 'the thoughts of all Englishmen should be for national

⁴⁴⁸ Interview with Chaim Lewis and his wartime recollections of Jewish Soho. local JML 18787

⁴⁴⁹ *JC*, 7 August 1914

⁴⁵⁰ See Tim Grady, *The German-Jewish Soldiers of the First World War in History and Memory* (Liverpool University Press, Liverpool 2011)

⁴⁵¹ Derek Penslar, 'An unlikely Internationalism: Jews at War in modern Western Europe', *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies*, 7:3, 2008, p.309

⁴⁵² *JC*, 28 August 1914

questions'⁴⁵³, but most controversially in the failure of the Board of Deputies or any other prominent Jewish institutions to forcefully question the government's enforcement of the War Measures Act of 22 August, which saw thousands of Jewish enemy citizens imprisoned.⁴⁵⁴ Far from condemning such actions, as surely it would have if it had occurred in pre-war Russia, *The Jewish Chronicle* reacted with silence, only venturing an opinion on the subject to engage in a spat with *The Times* concerning the apparently deliberate confusion of 'German' with Jew – 'Every Jew in the minds of these foolish people is of necessity a German Jew'.⁴⁵⁵ The bulk of established Jewry could trace their roots to Germany, and some maintained familial and business links to the country that were only severed by the opening of hostilities.⁴⁵⁶ The rise of anti-German agitation was a potent force in shaping national identity in the years before 1914. Anglo-German economic rivalry, the invasion scares of the preceding decade and concerns over the number of German waiters and shop assistants strategically placed along the east coast had created a virile anti-German sentiment in British society before the war.⁴⁵⁷

The course of the war was to witness widespread anti-German riots – particularly in August 1914, after the sinking of the *Lusitania* and the death of Lord Kitchener – and was attended by virulent newspaper attacks, particularly from the *Daily Mail*, and extensive anti-alien Government legislation.⁴⁵⁸ Panayi states 'all sections of British society became gripped by a passionate hatred of all things German',⁴⁵⁹ the Bishop of London exploded 'kill Germans! Kill them!... not for the sake of killing, but to save the world'.⁴⁶⁰ For patriotic Britons, Prussianism became a distorted malevolence to which Britishness could receive reflected glory, the brave and virtuous Tommy Atkins fighting against the desecrators of Belgium.

⁴⁵³ Cited in Levene, *War, Jews and the New Europe*, p.29

⁴⁵⁴ See C.C. Aronsfeld, 'Jewish Enemy Aliens in England During the First World War', *Jewish Social Studies*, Vol 17, 1956, pp.278-283

⁴⁵⁵ *JC*, 21 August 1914

⁴⁵⁶ Endelman, *Jews of Britain*, p.184

⁴⁵⁷ Panayi, *Enemy in our Midst*, p.41

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid* p.223, p.49, pp.54-61

⁴⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p.184

⁴⁶⁰ Bishop of London, cited in John Ramsden, *Don't Mention the War: the British and the Germans since 1890* (Little Brown, London 2006), p.93

53,324 Germans lived in Britain in 1911, of whom roughly half lived in London, predominantly around St Pancras, Stepney and Islington.⁴⁶¹ Despite the grossly exaggerated contemporary belief that there were 100,000 German waiting staff in London (in the imaginings of invasion novel writers such as Walter Wood ready to form a fifth column force in the event of war) many Germans were employed as waiters or waitresses, perhaps as many as 10 per cent of the profession, and an estimated half of master bakers in the city were German.⁴⁶² Stanley Brown, born 1906 in Southend, recalled the fate of his local baker once war was declared: 'the intense Germanophobia which built up during the first months of the war. this was highlighted to me by the frenzied destruction of a small bakery in the South Church Avenue owned by a man of German extraction – a third generation inhabitant of this country – who had been our family baker for some time'.⁴⁶³ Alice Linton, born in Hoxton in 1908, recalled a similar incidence of the prevalence of Germanophobia in the war years: 'The baker was a German and a very nice person... Although the baker was liked by everybody, more or less, when the war broke out they began looting his shop. Everything was taken and the whole place ransacked. It was sad to see how quickly people's attitude changed towards that man and his family'.⁴⁶⁴ The intense hostility towards even naturalised Britons of German origin saw many such victims attempt to demonstrate their loyalty by anglicising their Germanic sounding names (the most prominent of whom was King George V who changed the royal name from Saxe-Coburg-Gotha to Windsor in July 1917), and by public condemnations of German atrocities, the so called 'loyalty letters' that began to appear in *The Times* in May 1915.⁴⁶⁵ An ex-mayor of Bermondsey, Henry Morriss, recalled after the war: 'We were not without a large share of aliens in our midst, many of whom had been tradesmen and workpeople in the district for several years. Suddenly the fasciae of many shops

⁴⁶¹ Panayi, *Enemy in Our Midst*, p1; p.17. Panayi gives the 1911 German population of London as 27,000.

⁴⁶² Ibid, p.34; pp24-25

⁴⁶³ Stanley Brown, letter dated 21 July 1980 IWM 84/46/1

⁴⁶⁴ Linton, *Not Expecting Miracles*, p.9

⁴⁶⁵ Panayi, *Enemy in Our Midst*, p.187; p.196

told of *naes which passed in the night* [Morris' italics]. Schitzler, et cetera, became "The Albion Saloon" or "The British Barbers of Bermondsey" '.⁴⁶⁶

Mark Levene has identified the failure of established Jewry to defend the rights of Jewish enemy aliens, whilst simultaneously exhibiting a bellicose patriotism, as summative of the community's response to the pressures of war and the expectations of British public opinion.⁴⁶⁷ Perhaps here as well, memories of the Boer War – particularly the jingoist British press and the damage wrought by the 'Boerjuds' – influenced London Jewry's positioning towards a national rather than communal front. The *Jewish Chronicle* alluded to this when it advised its readers: 'We Jews should be particularly careful at a time like this, by our conduct and demeanour... so that we shall not arouse a spirit of hostility, which at a time of national anxiety and stress such as that upon which we are entering, is a force... ready to assert itself at the slightest provocation'.⁴⁶⁸

Established Jewry were far keener to aid the plight of another group of Jews stranded in Britain, the Jewish contingent of the Belgian refugees who began arriving in Britain in the first weeks of the war, numbering 250,000 at the peak of the migration.⁴⁶⁹ Receiving a warmth of welcome provided to few migrant groups arriving in Britain (despite perhaps the initial enthusiasm that greeted French Huguenots in the 17th Century), the British population energetically set out to help the new arrivals. 2,000 local committees were set up to administer provisions and accommodation for the 'brave' Belgians, whose plight was leant further sympathy in September 1914 by circulating rumours of German atrocities carried out against civilians in occupied Belgium.⁴⁷⁰ Among the Belgian refugees were a significant number of Jews, for whom the institutions of established Jewry began energetically raising money for. The *Jewish Chronicle* reported on 6 November: 'Under the auspices of the Wandsworth, Battersea and Balham Jewish Ladies Guild, a dance, in aid of the Jewish Belgian

⁴⁶⁶ Morris, *Bermondsey's Bit in the Greatest War*, p.5

⁴⁶⁷ Levene, *War, Jews and the New Europe*, pp.30-31

⁴⁶⁸ *JC*, 7 August 1914

⁴⁶⁹ Tony Kushner, 'Local heroes: Belgian refugees in Britain during the first World War', *Immigrants & Minorities*, 18:1 (1999), p.4

⁴⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p.3

Refugees JEWISH CHRONICLE and JEWISH WORLD fund will be held in Battersea Town hall, Wednesday 18th.⁴⁷¹

Attempts were made to house the Belgian Jews in the Jews' Temporary Shelter, however there wasn't enough room - a former workhouse building in Poland Street, Soho, provided temporary accommodation for the Belgian Jewish families. In December 1914, the refuge accommodated 842 Belgian Jews.⁴⁷² Geoffrey Black in his history of the Jewish West End, has written how the Belgian Jews 'made a significant contribution to the orthodox community of Soho', and that one of the children of these refugees, Rabbi Dr Isadore Epstein, 'was appointed principal of Jews' College in 1945'.⁴⁷³ Overall, the response of established Jewry in aiding the plight of Jewish Belgian refugees far outmatched the support the community lent enemy Jews interned in Britain, and can be explained simply by the national popularity of the former's cause compared to the general British hostility displayed towards the latter.

The Jewish volunteers who enlisted prior to conscription were the most valuable proof for Anglo-Jewry in demonstrating the selfless patriotism of the community. The *Jewish Chronicle* proudly praised the nationalist instinct of Jewish youth: 'The response of English Jewry to the call of the present crisis has, in fact, been one of the most noteworthy incidents in the whole of its history. Never before has the stream of martial ardour flowed in such extraordinary volume through the Jewish quarters. After this war there will be many theories which will have to be revised or discarded. One of the earliest to go by the board is the idea that the Jew is lacking in courage and cannot be a good soldier when duty calls him to the field'.⁴⁷⁴ By most contemporary and current estimations, approximately 10,000 Jews had volunteered before the Military Service Act came into force in July 1916, with 1,140 becoming officers.⁴⁷⁵ These figures became the shield of patriotism that the Jewish

⁴⁷¹ JC 6 November 1914

⁴⁷² Black, *Up West*, p.239

⁴⁷³ Ibid, p.238

⁴⁷⁴ JC, 25 December 1914

⁴⁷⁵ Adler, *British Jewry Book of Honour*, pp.2-3; IWM K94/2037 Harold Pollins, *World War 1 Jewish Soldiers KIA or Died on Service: Amendments to Michael Adler (ed.) "British Jews Book of Honour", 1922: and other comments and questions*. Pollins qualifies Adler's total of

community presented against opponents who challenged the Jewish war effort in the post-war period. However, such statistics reveal less on their own without an examination of the experiences of the men behind them - in particular their motivations for enlisting, interaction with Gentile troops, and the peculiar hardships in the trenches caused by their religion.

Occupation was an important determinant for enlistment amongst English Jews. As Asher Tropp has shown, a high proportion of young Jewish males in turn-of-the-century London found employment in office-based professions.⁴⁷⁶ During the last days of peace, clerks featured heavily in the vanguard of the pro-interventionist movement that sought to disrupt anti-war rallies such as the socialist demonstration at Trafalgar square on 2 August. The *Daily Chronicle* described such hecklers as 'a negligible contingent of youths... clerks by appearance' who sang 'patriotic songs until a heavy shower of rain dampened their enthusiasm'.⁴⁷⁷ The sedentary and somewhat monotonous nature of clerkship has been identified as a push factor behind enlistment, the spur of

10,000 but only slightly. During the period 1914-1916 there were varying estimations of the number of Jews serving in the British Army; *The Southern Reporter* estimated 10,000 as early as April 1915 (*Southern Reporter*, 1st April 1915), whilst the *Daily Record* quoted 18,000 Jews from the British Isles serving by September 1915 (*Daily Record*, 9th September 1915). Interestingly the numbers of volunteer enlistments in Ireland mirror those obtained in England, albeit on a proportional scale. Over 50,000 were raised from the entirety of Ireland between the outbreak of war and February 1915, with numbers dwindling from then on, with an overall total of 140,460 raised for the whole war. Whilst recruiting was poor compared to some areas of England and in the British context it was well behind the recruitment hauls in Scotland, Ulster and Dublin returned more recruits per 100,000 than the West of England in the first months of the war, and to return to the British context performed well in relation to Wales, with Mansfield noting that only 27% of Denbighshire Yeomanry could be filled by Welshmen. Reason's for enlistment roughly mirrored the English model: prevention of another 'Belgium' in Ireland, fighting Prussianism, adventure etc. however in the context of a postponed Home Rule bill due to be enacted on the return of peace, both Loyalists and Southern Nationalists had unique reasons for enlisting; the former to demonstrate loyalty to the Union, the Nationalists seeing a chance to demonstrate an ability for self-government through participation in armed conflict, and as has been more cynically suggested a chance to gain military experience for a forthcoming civil war or conflict with Britain. These are perhaps simplistic answers for Irish involvement in the war, a concrete and binding argument for the sacrifice of thousands of Irishmen for a Country the majority of Irishmen no longer wished to be united with complicated by emotion and sectarianism, but two interesting points arise from Irish enlistment; firstly that the last three months of the war saw a heavy resurgence of volunteers (almost 10,000), more than two years since the Easter Rising in Dublin, and secondly the lack of Conscription in Ireland for the duration of the war, a suggestion that the British Government considered Ireland's commitment to the British cause suspect. See Keith Jeffery, *Ireland and the Great War* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2000), pp.5-28

⁴⁷⁶ Asher Tropp, *Jews in the Professions in Great Britain 1891-1991* (Maccabeans, London 1991)

⁴⁷⁷ *Daily Chronicle* 3 August 1914, cited in Gregory, *The Last Great War*, p.15

danger and adventure the war offered such men provided an escape from the humdrum of everyday life. Herbert Asquith, son of the Prime Minister Herbert Henry Asquith, caught this sentiment in his poem *The Volunteer*:

'Here lies a clerk who half his life has spent

Toiling in ledgers in a city grey,

Thinking that so his days would drift away

With no lance broken in life's tournament.'⁴⁷⁸

Such yearnings for adventure were not restricted to the middle class professions, as Nicholas Mansfield's account of the enlistment motivations for English farmworkers has shown.⁴⁷⁹ Unemployment was another powerful motivating factor for enlistment. The economic slump that followed the outbreak of war had a chronic impact on London's working class, with male employment falling by 10% between July and August. Indeed, a disproportionate number of the earliest volunteers to enlist in London came from the urban unskilled workforce, many of them recently made unemployed.⁴⁸⁰ Patriotism was often less an effective reason for enlisting in the minds of young recruits than was peer pressure (in particular the Pals Battalions and the desire not to be left behind whilst friends enlisted), bullying from patriotic employers and spontaneous movements such as the White Feather Campaign⁴⁸¹, adventure, and perhaps foolishly the prospect of better pay and food in the army.⁴⁸² The army represented for many a chance to escape boredom and poverty: 'When the farmer stopped my pay because it was raining, and we couldn't thrash, I said to my seventeen-year-old mate, "bugger him. We'll go off and join the army" '.⁴⁸³

Another factor making volunteerism and a life in the army a more attractive option for young men was the remarkable makeover of the image of the British

⁴⁷⁸ Herbert Asquith, *The Volunteer and Other Poems* (1916) Reprint (Kessinger Publishing, London 2010)

⁴⁷⁹ See Mansfield, *English Farmworkers and Local Patriotism*

⁴⁸⁰ Gregory, *The Last Great War*. p.31

⁴⁸¹ Gullace, *Blood of our Sons*, pp73-98

⁴⁸² Mansfield, *English Farmworkers and Local Patriotism*, pp88-89

⁴⁸³ Interview with Ronald Blythe, *Akenfield- Portrait of an English Village* (1969), cited in Mansfield, *English Farmworkers and Local Patriotism*, p.90

soldier during the heady early months of the war. The cult of the General as national hero was still strong⁴⁸⁴ but it was accompanied by a new idolisation of the common soldier, 'Tommy Atkins', who as Gullace has characterised, shed his dour Victorian image to become 'the ideal-typical British soldier... brave, cheerful, martial, and fair'.⁴⁸⁵ In no more vivid form was the popularity of the soldier demonstrated than the outbreak of 'Khaki Fever', an obsessive ailment afflicting mainly young girls aggravated by the 'patriotic involvement and warrior garb' of the newly enlisted servicemen (Richard Voeltz makes the point that the 'Fever' was short lived due to the mass mobilisation of women into war industries and the wearing of khaki in the factories, negating the novelty).⁴⁸⁶ The revolution in the image of the soldier was significant in signalling a transformation of the relationship between masculinity, the state and national identity. The authorities through skilful propaganda posters promoted the soldier as the patriotic defender of the country but in a more local spirit the defender of the home and family determined to prevent the atrocities inflicted on Belgium from reaching his community.⁴⁸⁷

Contrary to the overall metropolitan trend that saw a disproportionate number of volunteers from the working class professions, amongst English Jews an equally disproportionate number of the earliest recruits were drawn from the middle classes. The experiences of Norman Bentwich, a Jewish law clerk in Fleet Street, attest to this. Norman's decision to enlist in August 1914 'released [him] from the rigours and petty annoyances of my present situation' and to 'don the proud khaki and feel a wondrous sensation of being involved in a just cause'.⁴⁸⁸ Norman did not feel any pressure to hide his Jewishness upon enlistment, as other Jewish soldiers felt the need to do, either by attesting to a different faith when questioned, or anglicising their name. The anti-alien

⁴⁸⁴ Reader, *Duty's Call*, p.52

⁴⁸⁵ Gullace, *Blood of our Sons*, p36

⁴⁸⁶ Richard Voeltz, 'The Antidote to 'Khaki Fever'? The Expansion of the British Girl Guides during the First World War', *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 27, no. 4 (Oct. 1992) p636;

⁴⁸⁷ Gullace, *Blood of our Sons*, p37; Michael Sanders & Phillip Taylor, *British Propaganda during the First World War 1914-1918* (The Macmillan Press LTD, London 1982), pp37-40

⁴⁸⁸ Norman Bentwich, *My Seventy Seven Years: An Account of my Life and Times 1883-1960*. (Routledge and Kegan Paul Limited, London 1962)

campaign waged in the decades prior to 1914 led many Jews with foreign sounding names to adopt English ones – a process made more common by the war due to the rise of Germanophobia and the pre-existing rumours of institutionalised antisemitism within the British Army.⁴⁸⁹ The reverend Michael Adler noted this during his visits to the battlefields: ‘In the early days of the war certain of our men attempted to conceal their identity by not reporting themselves as Jews. Some, whilst remaining Jews, changed their names, as in the classic example of Gunner Leib Kalmanovitch adopting the name Louis Bonaparte, whilst the name of Smith became a favourite’.⁴⁹⁰

Such practice inevitably confused and limited the public perception of the Jewish contribution to the war, admitted openly by the *Jewish Chronicle* in late August: ‘It is always difficult to calculate the real number of Jews serving with the colours. Not only are names no criterion, but for reasons which are well known Jewish soldiers in a large number of cases do not enlist as such’.⁴⁹¹ The Board of Jewish Guardians held an emergency meeting to discuss the ‘invisibility’ of Jewish soldiers in October, concluding that recent examples of antisemitic behaviour at recruiting stations across London was the dominant factor behind it. In particular, the Board noted the rough treatment of Jews at a recruitment depot in Hackney.⁴⁹² The *Jewish Chronicle* interviewed the recruiting officer at the affected depot, who said: ‘What happened was that we found a great deal of very strongly developed prejudice among a certain section – not the best – against the Jewish recruits. Generally they gave the Jews a rough handling in every possible way. They called them names, hustled them, distorted their foreign names, and made things generally offensive. We therefore thought it best, in the interests of the Jews themselves, to refuse them’.⁴⁹³ A correspondent wrote to the *Jewish Chronicle* in December complaining that his son had been refused enlistment into the 4th City of London Fusiliers on the basis that he was a Jew; the regiment apparently had a policy

⁴⁸⁹ Anne Lloyd, ‘Jews Under Fire: The Jewish Community and Military Service in World War 1 Britain’. PhD Thesis (Southampton University 2009), p.74

⁴⁹⁰ Adler, *British Jewry Book Of Honour*, p.46

⁴⁹¹ *JC*, 28 August 1914

⁴⁹² London Metropolitan Archive (hereafter LMA), Board of Deputies ACC/3121/A Minute books October 21 1914; see also Lloyd, *Jews Under Fire*, p.80

⁴⁹³ *JC*, 9 October 1914

of not enlisting Jews.⁴⁹⁴ Whatever the motivation for the practice of recruits masking their Jewishness, the outcome was a loss of publishable recruitment figures for an Anglo-Jewish establishment determined to display full support for the war effort.⁴⁹⁵

In contrast to the fears of the Jewish establishment, the number of serious cases of antisemitism experienced by Jewish soldiers during the war were surprisingly few. Congenial relations between Jews and Gentiles in the trenches were the norm. However, cases of both direct and indirect prejudice against Jews did occur, undermining the victim's sense of patriotism on which they enlisted and the position of enlightened tolerance that the Ministry of Information portrayed Britain's cause in, especially as the war progressed.⁴⁹⁶ Many Jewish soldiers were quick to attest to the comradery between the faiths in their letters home. Colonel Sergeant R. Harris with the 4th Royal Fusiliers wrote that 'I feel that the way we were treated and the privileges we received go a long way to prove that the old prejudice against the Jew has entirely disappeared, and that no man need be ashamed to admit that he is a Jew.'⁴⁹⁷ The *Jewish Chronicle* was quick to publish such sentiments from Jewish soldiers between late 1914 and throughout 1915, in part to encourage further Jewish enlistment.⁴⁹⁸ The reverend Michael Adler reflected after the war 'I have frequently been asked whether there were any signs of anti-Semitism in the life of the great British Army, and I say without the slightest hesitation, that whatever indication of ill feeling there was towards the Jew was so small as to be entirely negligible. The Christian soldier was warmly attached to his Jewish "pal", and the relations between the soldiers of all denominations was remarkably cordial.'⁴⁹⁹

Jacob Plotzker of the 47th Royal Fusiliers experienced the occasional anti-Jewish jibe in his time in the forces, 'having one or two fights over the topic', but the tight military discipline of his unit ensured such incidents ceased after a

⁴⁹⁴ L Newman, *JC*, 4 December 1914

⁴⁹⁵ Lloyd, A. *Jews Under Fire*, p.80

⁴⁹⁶ Messinger, Gary. *British Propaganda and the State in the First World War* (Manchester University Press, Manchester 1992)

⁴⁹⁷ 'Letter from Jewish Soldiers' *JC*, 11 December 1914

⁴⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹⁹ Adler, *British Jewry Book Of Honour*, p.46

week or so.⁵⁰⁰ British soldiers, when questioned directly on the subject of their Jewish comrades, often answered in glowing terms. Charles Ward of the 20th Battalion Middlesex Regiment praised the high military quality of two Jewish recruits from Stamford Bridge.⁵⁰¹ Bill Smedly of the 12th Battalion South Wales Borderers Regiment denied that there was any real antisemitic behaviour towards the Jewish soldiers in his unit, although did admit that other recruits put 'crabs in the bed of my Jewish friend "silverman", but just for fun'.⁵⁰² Whether such an incident would represent a crude example of Jewish victimisation within the British Army or simple high jinks amongst young men cannot be ascertained from Smedly's account. Pre-war tensions and prejudices certainly followed recruits into the army. A young recruit from Lewisham did not attempt to hide his contempt for the Jewish East End in a letter to his father in May 1917: 'So the recruiters have woke up. They are worse than a set of Jew boys. However better late than never I suppose. So they are rounding the gallant Hebrews up... I did not expect to see one in Khaki when I came here but out of our company – 200 strong, a dozen of them are Jews. I can see Whitechapel getting a V.C yet – if the war goes on long enough'.⁵⁰³ Charlie 'Ginger' Byrne, a private in a Machine Gun Corps, described his Jewish commanding sergeant as 'a "Jew boy". Proper "fiddler" '.⁵⁰⁴ Byrne goes on to reveal the sergeant in question owned a Woolworths store in London, implying the term 'fiddler' was a derogatory antisemitic slur against the perceived economic avarice of Jewish businessmen.

That some British soldiers harboured a preconceived dislike of Jews upon their enlistment, and which diminished little upon contact with Jews in the army, is little proof of an ingrained aversion to Jews as soldiers within the British Army in the period 1914-1918. Little convincing evidence has been provided to show that in an official capacity Jews were deliberately hindered in their progress or barred from achieving certain ranks, despite the persuasive arguments of Tony

⁵⁰⁰ IWM , Jacob Plotzker, sound recording 12566

⁵⁰¹ IWM Charles Ward Cat No. 12026.

⁵⁰² IWM, Bill Smedley, Cat No. 10917

⁵⁰³ IWM J A C Clarke, letter dated 26 May 1917

⁵⁰⁴ IWM Charlie Ginger Byrne Cat 24935

Kushner and Gavin Schaffer.⁵⁰⁵ English Jews attained officer rank in proportionally higher numbers than the national average, and the Australian Jew John Monash became one of the army's most celebrated and respected generals.⁵⁰⁶ There was no equivalent in the British Army of the 1916 *Judenählung*, the census of Jewish soldiers in the German Army that sought to prove Jewish disloyalty.⁵⁰⁷ This is not to say opposition to Jewish military advancement did not exist in the army, and evidence can be found in individual cases. Henry Myer recalled how his cousin Ernest, having taken the Certificate C for promotion to Field Rank – 'in effect to qualify for command of a Battalion in War' – had been told by one of the examining board that a fellow examiner had exclaimed "We can't pass Myer – he's a Jew!"⁵⁰⁸ Such reasoning may have been based on popular scepticism of Jews as soldiers, or individual prejudice, but a lack of institutional antisemitism within the army is borne out by the majority of the examiners who outvoted their colleague and passed Myer for command.

Antisemitism in the army occurred at an individual rather than an institutional level and had only limited significance in the continuation of cordial Jewish and Gentile relations. However, the experience of even isolated prejudice was a shock for many Jewish soldiers, especially the majority of British Jews who regarded themselves as 'Britons of the Jewish persuasion or Faith'.⁵⁰⁹ Isolated in the stratified world of the Edwardian period, for many upper class Jews such as Henry Myer, to be treated any differently, and worse, derogatively, by their fellow Britons came as a shock. Myer sums up his experiences of antisemitism thus: 'Whilst we were treated by the vast majority of our fellow Englishmen in similar fashion to our many Gentile friends, there was a substantial number of Gentiles, who either did not understand or did not want to associate with, or

⁵⁰⁵ Tony Kushner 'Without Intending any of the most undesirable features of a colour bar': race, science, Europeaness and the British Armed Forces during the Twentieth Century', *Patterns of Prejudice*, 46:3-4, (2012) pp.339-374; Gavin Schaffer 'Unmasking the 'Muscle Jew': the Jewish Soldier in British War Service 1899-1945', *Patterns of Prejudice*, 46:3-4, (2012) pp.375-396

⁵⁰⁶ For more on John Monash see Roland Perry, *Monash: The Outsider Who Won A War* (Random House Australia, North Sydney 2014)

⁵⁰⁷ Grady, *German-Jewish Soldiers*,

⁵⁰⁸ Myer, *Soldiering of Sorts*, p.28

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid. p.95

even disliked British Jews, no matter how assimilated they appeared to be.⁵¹⁰ Such experiences of prejudice dimmed for those British Jews who experienced it a previously unvanquished sense of Britishness – replaced in the case of Henry Myer by a lost Jewish identity nurtured by his later experiences in the Jewish Battalion, as will be discussed in more detail later in chapter three.

XII. Faith Under Fire: Judaism in the Armed Forces

1914-1918

The war placed serious strain on the ability of Jews serving in the British Army to uphold their religious commitments. Jewish chaplains were not assigned to individual regiments, unlike their Christian counterparts, with only the roaming Chief Reverend Michael Adler to organise Jewish services for the majority of the conflict. Achieving leave or the relinquishing of military duties for religious festivals was notoriously difficult for Jewish soldiers, and where this was granted, inadvertently spread accusations of special treatment. Providing Jewish soldiers – thinly spread out amongst the various battalions of the British Army – with kosher food proved a logistical impossibility. Overall, the war contributed to a significant decline in the religiosity of young Jewish males, and the households they returned to after the war.

Of course religiosity was highly variable amongst individual Jewish soldiers, and declining levels of strict observance amongst English Jews in particular was a pre-war phenomenon.⁵¹¹ There were however, a significant number (perhaps a majority⁵¹²) of practicing Jewish soldiers fighting in the British Army who expected and wished for their religious needs to be accommodated during their time of service. Aaron Cohen delayed his enlistment due to his concerns that he would be unable to fulfil his religious duties, reluctantly signing on in September 1915 as ‘it was expected of him’.⁵¹³ He suppressed news of his

⁵¹⁰ Ibid. p.79

⁵¹¹ Panayi, *The Anglicisation of East European Jewish Food*, p.294

⁵¹² Adler, *British Jewry Book of Honour*, p.46

⁵¹³ IWM Lieutenant Aaron Simeon Cohen 1891-1915, K00/1392

enlistment from his close knit and highly religious family until the last moment; the news of his embarkation for France reached them just as they were setting off to the synagogue for Jewish New Year, causing consternation.⁵¹⁴ The Board of Deputies sought to ease the burden of the Jewish fighting men, empowering the existing Shechita Committee to deduce means of providing kosher meat for the troops on the front, and sanctioning Michael Adler's request to join the Army in France to provide services and organise burial for the Jewish dead.⁵¹⁵

Adler compiled a Prayer book that was issued to every Jewish soldier⁵¹⁶, and crisscrossed the various regiments of the British Army, attaching himself to those with the highest number of Jewish soldiers. In Baupaume in 1917 he managed to put on a service for 1500 Jewish soldiers.⁵¹⁷ His hectic schedule often resulted in mistakenly committing to two services in different parts of France at the same time. Henry Myer relates one particular service held for the Jewish troops of his battalion where, as the senior officer present, he had to step in to lead a service Adler had failed to show up for.⁵¹⁸ Adler attempted to intervene on behalf of Jewish soldiers to secure leave for Jewish festivals with only mixed success. Individual Jews were occasionally granted leave for Yom Kippur and the Day of Atonement, but the Army informed Adler that this would be impossible to grant en masse, for obvious reasons.⁵¹⁹ Where leave did occur, it could create tension between Jews and non-Jews. A London-born soldier complained in April 1917 'I do not think I shall receive any leave for three months at least. All the "Shonks" have got 4 days leave this Easter to celebrate the Passover'.⁵²⁰ Near the beginning of the war in December 1914 the *Daily Record* reported on a novel solution to the potential resentment caused by the issue: 'a suggestion has been made that all the duties in the camps on Christmas day should be done by the Jewish recruits, and so permit of the Gentiles having a real holiday. This proposal has been seriously put forward by some Jews who maintain that this would be an excellent way of

⁵¹⁴ Ibid.

⁵¹⁵ LMA BOD ACC/3121/C/16 November 1914

⁵¹⁶ Michael Adler, *Prayer Book for Jewish Sailors and Soldiers* (Eyre and Spottiswoode, London 1916)

⁵¹⁷ Adler, *British Jewry Book of Honour*, p.50

⁵¹⁸ Myer, *Soldiering of Sorts*, p.25

⁵¹⁹ Adler, *British Jewry Book of Honour*, p.40

⁵²⁰ IWM J A C Clarke, letter dated 8 April 1917

showing their appreciation of the leave granted to them in September and October that enabled them to observe certain of their religious festivals.⁵²¹ The suggestion came to nothing due to the overall scarcity of Jewish soldiers across the various battalions of the British Army. The same *Daily Record* reporter commented, albeit on the basis of hearsay, that one training centre in London contained only one Jewish soldier out of 4,000.⁵²² However, the proposal does suggest that some Jewish soldiers did feel uncomfortable with the special leave creating resentment amongst their fellow soldiers and potentially creating a precedent for the accusation that Jewish soldiers were provided special treatment. As the war progressed and the relentlessness of military action increased on the western front, the opportunities for Jewish soldiers to take leave for Jewish festivals and the Sabbath decreased. Jacob Plotzker, born in Leeds into an orthodox family who moved to London before the war, recorded that he observed Passover and had matzos and wine sent on (presumably by family members), but that generally in his unit no ceremony was held on the Sabbath and no day off was granted.⁵²³ Plotzker recalled that some Jewish soldiers did ask for leave for Jewish festivals, but that this would only be granted if they held favour with their commanding officers. In general, Plotzker stated that he and other Jewish soldiers in his battalion were given no special treatment, and were treated like any other soldiers.⁵²⁴

Despite the gradual addition of seven more chaplains by the end of 1917, Adler and his colleague's efforts were insufficient to meet the needs of the majority of Jewish troops, as he readily admitted 'The number of chaplains on the western front was never adequate, the consequence being that each was allotted an area far too wide an extent to be thoroughly worked by one Chaplain. In spite of numerous applications to the authorities none of my colleagues had a motor car allotted to him to enable him to journey as often as necessary through the length and breadth of his Army or Base'.⁵²⁵ Indeed, having considered the request for motor car assistance, the Army ruled that

⁵²¹ 'A Laudable Suggestion' *Daily Record*, 9 December 1914

⁵²² *ibid*

⁵²³ IWM, Jacob Plotzker, sound recording 12566

⁵²⁴ *Ibid.* Plotzker does state that Jewish soldiers in his unit were relieved from their normal chores on the Day of Atonement (except parade duties), but this seems to have been the only exception, and Plotzker does not indicate if this was a one off or annual agreement.

⁵²⁵ Adler, M. *British Jewry Book of Honour*. p.50

such provision was not in the best interests of the Army as a whole, and was denied.⁵²⁶ This summed up the Army's lack of interest in the privation of Jewish religious needs on the frontline, and was matched by the increasingly half-hearted commitment to the issue from the Board of Deputies – the Shechita Committee switched focus to supplying kosher meat for the Home Front following the introduction of rationing in January 1917.⁵²⁷ This was a consequence of the larger concern the Anglo-Jewish establishment felt towards the increasing 'differentiation' of the Jewish soldier (strongly influenced by the campaign for a Jewish Battalion in 1917), and institutions such as the BoD and the JWSC gradually removed support for any initiatives deemed contributory to this process. This led to frustration – one Jewish soldier from the 10th Royal Fusiliers complaining '5 services in 3 years. Us Jews feel we are being neglected'.⁵²⁸ However, the issue of meeting the religious needs of its Jewish soldiers was far from unique to the British Army. All the main belligerent nations struggled to accommodate the religious requirements of their increasingly multicultural armies as the extended duration of the war saw the necessity to tap the vast resources of the various European empires. Jewish troops in the German Army encountered great difficulties in organising religious festivals, as seen by the struggle encountered by the German Jewish soldier Martin Lion, who took it upon himself to organise a Seder for the Jewish troops in his sector. Having battled against the authorities to secure even a room for the service, the gathering of German Jewish soldiers had a sombre and melancholy tone, summed up by the speech to the troops made by Lion at the end of the ceremony: 'these rightly sinister men at home are seeking to deprive us. Today we think of our families and loved ones at home, we committed ourselves together to stand up for our Jewish heritage, and to continue in the never ceasing fight against these forces of darkness'.⁵²⁹

Many Jewish recruits experienced a relative decline in religiosity as a result of their war service. Private Jake Copeland attempted to adhere to Jewish dietary law whilst in the trenches but found 'four years in the army knocked it all out of

⁵²⁶ Cited in Anne Lloyd, 'Jews Under Fire', p.104

⁵²⁷ LMA BoD ACC/3121/C/16 January 1917

⁵²⁸ Letter from Stanley Solomon of 10th Royal Fusiliers, printed in *JC*, 22nd March 1918

⁵²⁹ IWM Martin Lion 92/26/1

me'.⁵³⁰ A Gentile British soldier from Tottenham, Charles Ward, recalled how by the end of the war the Jewish soldiers in his battalion fought 'as hard as anyone for the fat left over from frying bacon'.⁵³¹ As was discussed in chapter one, Jewish chaplain Arthur Barnett faced mutiny amongst the men attached to him after his attempts to switch their normal bacon rations for kosher equivalents.⁵³² Plotzker recollected that he never received kosher food during his service in the army, but was of the opinion that strictness of Jewish dietary law 'didn't really matter when there was a war on'.⁵³³ Many Jewish soldiers held little or no religious convictions before enlistment. Those who did, however, experienced frustration with the Army authorities for inept and half-hearted attempts to accommodate Jewish religious practice, and disillusionment with the Jewish establishment for failing to take a stand on the issue.

XIII. British Zionism and the Road Towards the Balfour Declaration 1914-1917

Prior to 1914, there was little evidence pointing towards the dominant and divisive impact political Zionism would have on Anglo-Jewry. The British Zionist organisation Chovevie Zion remained the modest forerunner of an insignificant political undercurrent, deemed by the association of Jewish Literary Societies to be a subject of 'too limited interest' to warrant a lecture on.⁵³⁴ The visit of the World Zionist Congress president Theodore Herzl in 1895 and again in 1901 failed to stimulate any lasting intellectual debate or impetus into the British Zionist movement, and even as late as 1914 'The prevailing attitude of the vast majority of the community was one of bland unconcern [towards Zionism]'.⁵³⁵ And yet the issue of procuring a collective Jewish homeland would become the central Anglo-Jewish concern of the war by 1917, splitting the community into

⁵³⁰ Oral testimony of Jack Cope/and, Manchester Jewish Museum, J71

⁵³¹ IWM Charles Ward Cat No. 12026.

⁵³² *JC*, 28 February 1919

⁵³³ IWM, Jacob Plotzker, sound recording 12566

⁵³⁴ Cited in Stuart Cohen, *English Zionists and British Jews: The Communal Politics of Anglo-Jewry, 1895-1920* (Princeton University Press, Princeton 1982), p.32

⁵³⁵ *Ibid*, p.156

pro- and anti-Zionist camps, and irrevocably transforming British perceptions of the Jews' place within the Empire and their commitment to the war effort. This section will first examine the origins of organised Zionism in Britain to establish the weakness of the movement in 1914, but will also show that early enthusiasm for Zionism within established Jewry can be interpreted as the extension of assimilationist policies through Zionism. It will then assess the British motivations behind the Balfour Declaration of November 1917 to pinpoint the British Government's attitude and relationship with Zionism and more importantly for this study, what this reveals about Government and British attitudes to Jews in Britain at this stage of the war. Finally, it will be shown how the war led inexorably to the growth of political Zionism in Britain, and how this had a transformational impact on the internal communal politics of established Jewry.

The unsteady beginnings of British Zionism reflect the 'relatively' benign political and religious conditions to which English Jews were accustomed compared to the patchy and often discriminatory laws their co-religionists were subject to on the continent in the years preceding 1914. For instance, British Jews had no direct parallel of the epiphanic realisation experienced by Theodore Herzl for the necessity of a Jewish homeland upon witnessing a Parisian crowd chanting 'Death to the Jews!' in the wake of the Dreyfus affair, or the necessity to form self-protection leagues by Vladimir Jabotinsky in Odessa following a spate of antisemitic pogroms.⁵³⁶ As has been discussed, the leading elements of established Jewry pursued policies directed towards continuing the process of assimilation and integration of the community within British society begun over two centuries previously. Late nineteenth-century political Zionism presented the Jews of Britain with an entirely different ideology. Zionists groups – such as the Chovevie Zion Association of England (Est.1890) – argued that British Jewry's position was 'inherently unnatural; the Jews would not gain authentic citizenship by endeavouring to separate the

⁵³⁶ Jacques Kornberg, 'Theodor Herzl: A Reevaluation', *Journal of Modern History*, 52 (1980), pp. 226–252 Published by the University of Chicago Press. See Vladimir Jabotinsky, *The story of the Jewish Legion* (Bernard Ackerman, New York 1945)

religious from the national in their creed, or by choosing the path of assimilation. Political independence within defined territorial boundaries was the only solution'.⁵³⁷

Chovevie Zion began as an immigrant orientated movement, regularly meeting at the Jewish Working Men's Club in East London. Recent arrivals provided the burgeoning Zionist movement with numerical muscle and the emotional commitment to the cause borne from their experiences of persecution in Russia. However, the group also attracted influential figures from the West End Jewish establishment. The first meeting in May 1890 attracted among others Sir Samuel Montagu, Lord Nathaniel Rothschild and the President of the Jewish Board of Guardians Sir Benjamin Louis Cohen.⁵³⁸ Samuel Montagu, the philanthropic MP for Whitechapel, presented a positive endorsement of Zionism at a meeting the following year at the Great Assembly Hall in Mile End: 'Many considered it a religious duty and privilege to cultivate with their own hands the soil of the Holy Lands'. He went on to state that the Arabs, with religion, customs and language 'nearly akin to the Hebrews' would make more tolerant overlords than the Russian: 'better to be under Ismail rather than Esau, to live with Arabs rather than persecuting Russians'.⁵³⁹

Two years later Montagu outlined his public support for Zionism and Chovevie Zion further, stating he would 'yield to no-one in his appreciative regard for the Holy Land. Nothing would delight him more than to know that a multitude of Jews were happy and prosperous cultivating the soil of Palestine and endeavouring to make that land flow again with milk and honey as in former times'.⁵⁴⁰ Privately, Montagu doubted the practicality of large scale Jewish settlement in Palestine, as he confirmed in a letter to Herzl in 1897: 'I do not think that Jews can be established in Palestine excepting by the voluntary combination of the great powers or by some leader who would command the confidence of the Jewish race. I would not like to see a very large number of

⁵³⁷ Cohen, *English Zionists and British Jews*, p.12

⁵³⁸ *ibid*, pp.8-9

⁵³⁹ *JC*, 29 May 1891

⁵⁴⁰ *JC*, 25 November 1892

Jews placed under Turkish rule at the present time.⁵⁴¹ The insincerity of Montagu's public positive comments on Zionism can be attributed to two factors common amongst prominent West End Jews involved in the movement prior to 1914. A need to appease the prevailing pro-Zionist sentiment of the immigrant Jewish communities (who Montagu, as MP for Whitechapel, was politically incentivised to indulge), and the pressing desire to deflect further immigration away from Britain.

On this point, it can be argued that West London Zionists shared similar concerns with anti-alien agitators. Indeed, there is evidence Zionist groups were actively supporting anti-alien candidates in the 1900 general election. One of the leading British Zionist of the war years, Chaim Weizmann, would later write supportively of the actions of the British Brothers' League founder William Evans Gordon: 'Sir William Evans Gordon had no particular anti-Jewish prejudices. He acted, as he thought, according to his best lights and in the most kindly way, in the interests of his country... he was sincerely ready to encourage any settlement of Jews almost anywhere in the British Empire, but he failed to see why the ghettos of London or Leeds or Whitechapel should be made into the branches of the ghettos of Warsaw and Pinsk'.⁵⁴² The support or at least sympathy with anti-alien sentiment by West End Zionists shows that the politics of integration, or in this case the politics of prevention, remained the dominant communal policy of established Jewry when presented by the controversies of immigration, and formed the basis of the commitment to Zionism among some of its leading proponents. This can be seen in how the West End memberships of Chovevei Zion and the later English Zionist Federation (est.1899), increasingly dominated the direction of organised Zionism in Britain, and more energy was invested in the promotion of English

⁵⁴¹ Letter from Montagu to Herzl 14 July 1897. Central Zionist Archive A file H VIII 575, cited in Cecil Bloom, 'Samuel Montagu and Zionism', *Jewish Historical Studies*, Vol. 34 (1994-1996), p31

⁵⁴² Geoffrey Alderman has shown that the English Zionist Federation in 1900 supported out and out anti-alienist such as David Hope Kyd in Whitechapel, on the basis that support for anti-alienists would help 'divert the tide of emigration that now takes place into Western countries'. Alderman, *Modern British Jewry*, p.253; Chaim Weizmann, *Trial and Error: the Autobiography of Chaim Weizmann [with a Portrait]* (Hamish Hamilton, London 1949), p.119

manners and habits amongst the immigrant members who made up the bulk of the movement.⁵⁴³

West End involvement in Zionism before 1914 therefore represented little more than the latest endeavour to sanitise and assimilate the immigrant half of Anglo-Jewry, in the mould of the Jewish Lads and Girls Brigades, the Jew's Free School and the Jews Temporary Shelter, 'through which to introduce to poor and alien Jews the values of the English middle class'.⁵⁴⁴ Zionism amongst the Jewish elites lacked dynamic and coherent leadership, particularly with regard to the practicalities of Jewish settlement in Palestine, and also lacked the numbers. Only eleven British Jews attended the First Zionist Congress and on their own admission 'were not truly representative of the community'.⁵⁴⁵ The secretary of the Board of Deputies, Charles Emanuel, summed up the sentiments of the bulk of established Jewry regarding Zionism when giving evidence to the Royal Commission on Alien Immigration in 1902: '[The Zionists'] suggestion is that Palestine is an alternative to England as a place of emigration from Russia. As we have no home in Palestine at present, and no right to go there, I contest that.'⁵⁴⁶ Certainly British Zionism operated at the outer periphery of the Herzlian continental network, and overall the movement retained the appearance of a fringe movement even within Established Jewry prior to 1914.⁵⁴⁷

The coming of war significantly revived the political fortunes of the listing British Zionist movement. Increasingly during the war, Zionism became a platform from which opponents of Jewish leadership could project their criticism and opposition. As has been seen the war tested the ability and judgment of the London Jewish elite's nominal leadership on multiple occasions. The Board of Deputies' silence during the internment of alien Jews and the failure to defend the immigrant population in the face of local and national anger arising from the

⁵⁴³ Cohen, *English Zionists and British Jews*, pp.10-11

⁵⁴⁴ Steyn, *The Jew*, p.75

⁵⁴⁵ Cohen, *English Zionists and British Jews*, p.33

⁵⁴⁶ Charles Emmanuel evidence to the Royal Commission on Alien Immigration 1902, Cited in Bloom, *Samuel Montagu and Zionism*, p.19

⁵⁴⁷ Cohen, *English Zionists and British Jews*, p.29

conscription crisis convinced many within the Jewish West End barred from the levers of power that the grandees on the Board of Deputies did not speak for, or represent, their interests. One of the most vocal critics of Jewish leadership before and during the war was Leo Greenberg, the editor of the *Jewish Chronicle*. Born in Birmingham but educated at a Jewish school in Maida Vale, West London, Greenberg was a leading champion of unrestricted immigration in the 1890s and staunchly defended the rights of Jewish immigrants during the heights of the anti-alien agitation in the early 1900s. His attraction to Jewish nationalism was as Cesarani has stated, 'driven as much by the belief that it was vital to fight assimilation as by the need to create a Jewish state'.⁵⁴⁸ His acquisition of the *Jewish Chronicle* in 1906 secured a national mouthpiece for the cause of Zionism, and the war years saw the famous paper mobilised in support of Jewish nationalism, in addition to fulfilling the role of the community's most ardent purveyor of British patriotism.

However Greenberg's commitment to Zionism during the war would be driven less by the desire to see the practical implementation of its ideals, but rather the opportunity it presented to attack the assimilationist policies of Jewish leadership. In this endeavour he was joined by the scholar Moses Gaster, the writer Israel Zangwill and other less famous advocates of Zionism, who used the issue of Jewish nationalism - which represented the antithesis of the assimilationist policy of the Jewish elites - to cultivate and consolidate their existing opposition to their leadership. As Alderman has put it 'Whenever the establishment needed to be chastised, the Zionists could be relied upon to administer the punishment'.⁵⁴⁹ Already by 1915, a resolution encouraging the establishment of a 'publicly recognised, legally secured home for the Jewish people in Palestine', was signed by 77,000 British Jews, indicating for the first time widespread support for Zionism within British Jewry.⁵⁵⁰

A clear example that the issue of Zionism was opening a serious breach within the Jewish establishment came in May 1917, when leading anti-Zionists

⁵⁴⁸ Cesarani, *Jewish Chronicle*, pp.104-106

⁵⁴⁹ Alderman, *Modern British Jewry*, pp.230-231

⁵⁵⁰ Statistic cited in Walter Laqueur, *The History of Zionism* (Taurus Parke Paperbacks, London 2003), p.158. Unfortunately Laqueur does not elaborate on the reasons behind the resolution or which group or groups presented it, but it does indicate the gains political Zionism was making nationally even a relatively short way into the war's duration.

headed by David Lindo Alexander, the president of the Board of Deputies, and Claude Montefiore, the President of the Anglo-Jewish Association, submitted a letter to *The Times* furiously condemning the cause of Zionism on behalf of British Jewry as a whole. The background to this letter is long and complex but a brief outline of the arguments here will allow for a fuller understanding of the resulting controversy. The Conjoint Foreign Committee - established in 1878 to bring closer cooperation between the Board and the AJA and formed of seven representatives each - represented in effect the community's ministry for foreign affairs and enjoyed an open dialogue with the British Government which it used to speak confidently on behalf of British Jewry on foreign affairs. By 1914 however, the Conjoint was increasingly coming under attack from within established Jewry for the secrecy and undemocratic methods employed in decisions affecting the entirety of British Jewry.⁵⁵¹ Zionists bitterly represented the secret dialogue the Conjoint enjoyed with the Foreign Office during the war, especially after the appointment of the arch anti-Zionist Lucien Wolf to secretary of the committee in January 1915 opened up the distinct possibility the Conjoint would attempt to detach the British Government from the early formulations of a commitment to Zionism.⁵⁵²

Removing Wolf and ultimately, the dissolution - or at least neutralisation - of the Conjoint, became a primary goal for leading Zionists such as Greenberg and Weizmann, and they were presented with a perfect opportunity by the anti-Zionist letter to *The Times* on 24 May 1917. Under the headline 'Views of Anglo-Jewry', Alexander and Montefiore set out a stinging attack on Zionism for regarding 'all the Jewish communities of the world as constituting one homeless nationality', and outlined their main objections on the basis that: 'Emancipated Jews in this country regard themselves primarily as a religious community, and they have always based their claims to political equality with their fellow citizens of other creeds on this assumption... It follows that the establishment of a Jewish nationality in Palestine, founded on this theory of Jewish homelessness, must have the effect throughout the world of stamping the Jews as strangers in

⁵⁵¹ Newman, *Board of Deputies*, p.85

⁵⁵² For a detailed response of British Zionists to the Conjoint's activities during the war see Alderman, *Modern British Jewry*, pp.244-249. For an opposite account from the perspective of Wolf and the Conjoint see Levene, *War Jews and the New Europe*

their native lands, and of undermining their hard-won position as citizens and nationals of those lands'.⁵⁵³ The letter received a predictable response from within Zionist circles; the *Jewish Chronicle* labelled it 'a grave betrayal' and called for the Board of Deputies and the Anglo-Jewish Association to 'sweep away once and for ever this Conjoint Committee which has thus brought discredit on the community, and with which Anglo-Jewry has been encumbered only too long'.⁵⁵⁴

What was less predictable was the volume of anger registered by non-Zionists across the spectrum of British Jewry. The following day *The Times* reported: 'We have received more letters than we can find room for from Jewish correspondents taking strong exception to the statement, published yesterday, of the Conjoint Foreign Committee of the Board of Deputies of British Jews and the Anglo-Jewish Association'.⁵⁵⁵ The paper published a resignation letter from a member of the Conjoint Committee, who complained the sentiment of the statement 'differs so much from those which I hold that I have felt it my duty to resign my membership of the committee. I may add my belief that it does not represent the views of the vast majority of Jews and non-Jews here and elsewhere'.⁵⁵⁶ Mr S Gilbert, a member of the Board of Deputies and resident of Sutherland Avenue, West London, wrote: 'As a member of the Jewish Board of Deputies I feel it is necessary to enter the most emphatic protest against the letter... The Board of Deputies has never been consulted on the question of whether such a declaration should be issued... But today it finds that, without warning and without any attempt to gain its sanction, a manifesto has been issued in its name. From these facts you will gather the precise amount of authority which attaches to this declaration'.⁵⁵⁷ The level of anger within British Jewry created by the 24 May letter was driven not so much from support for Zionism but at the arrogance of Alexander and Montefiore to speak on behalf of Anglo-Jewry on such a decisive matter for the community's public image. Despite the pre-publication ignorance of the other member of the Conjoint and the Board of Deputies to the letter, for many underrepresented provincial Jews

⁵⁵³ *The Times*, 24 May 1917

⁵⁵⁴ *JC*, 25 May 1917

⁵⁵⁵ *The Times*, 25 May 1917

⁵⁵⁶ Letter from Mr E.M Adler, *Ibid*

⁵⁵⁷ Letter from Mr S Gilbert, *Ibid*

and disillusioned London opponents it confirmed old accusations of the secretiveness of the Conjoint and the oligarchic practices of the Board.

The following weeks would see the Conjoint voted out of existence by the Board and Alexander resign his presidency.⁵⁵⁸ The dissolution of the Conjoint did not necessarily indicate the triumph of the Zionist cause. The Conjoint was soon replaced by the 'Joint Foreign Committee' with Lucien Wolf acting as its influential secretary, and Alexander's replacement as President of the Board was the non-Zionist Sir Stuart Samuel, who incidentally had replaced his uncle Samuel Montagu as Liberal MP for Whitechapel in 1900.⁵⁵⁹ The controversy did however encapsulate the extent to which political Zionism had transformed into a divisive force within the internal politics of established Jewry as a direct result of the war.

The ability of a small and highly select group within the Jewish elite to speak for and set the agenda of British Jewry as a community had been broken, and replaced by competing forces within established Jewry revolving around whether the community's public status would be defined by support or opposition to the fulfilment of Jewish nationalism. The war had thrust the issue of Jewish nationalism onto the main stage of Anglo-Jewish politics. However, its position there was ultimately dependent on the British Government's growing interest in and final endorsement of Zionism in 1917, and therefore a discussion of the British motivations behind the Balfour Declaration is required here.

The increased geopolitical importance of the Middle East as a result of Britain's Eastern offensive against the Ottoman Empire in 1917 placed Palestine in the forefront of British society's perception of the war.⁵⁶⁰ Whilst the British public and press revelled in General Allenby's capture of Jerusalem, the Government was quick to perceive the propaganda benefits of swaying world Jewish opinion to the Entente's cause. An allied commitment to Zionism would strengthen the 'questionable' loyalty of Jewish support within the Entente

⁵⁵⁸ Alderman, *Modern British Jewry*, p.247

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid, pp.247-248

⁵⁶⁰ For more detail on the British attraction to Palestine during the war see Jill Hamilton, *God, Guns & Israel: Britain, the First World War and the Jews in the Holy Land 1914-1925* (Sutton Publishing, London 2004)

countries, flatter American Jewry, and potentially diminish the loyalty of Germany's 550,000 strong Jewish population to the German war effort.⁵⁶¹ In this transformed political climate, English Zionists wielded greater influence both within Anglo-Jewry and Whitehall. It allowed the respected chemist and President of the English Zionist Federation Chaim Weizmann to build a broad consensus of support amongst Lloyd George's War Cabinet and to directly influence the direction of British policy concerning the planned offensive against Turkey in the summer of 1917.⁵⁶² The efforts of Weizmann were greatly aided by a fond sentimentalism for the Holy Land that was strong amongst a number of influential government figures; namely the Prime Minister Lloyd George, Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour, Leo Amery and Alfred (1st Viscount) Milner. Lloyd George, reflecting after a meeting with Weizmann in 1915, stated 'I realised as [Weizmann] was speaking, that the names of settlements in this far-flung and dusty land [Palestine] were more familiar to me than any of the places on the western front'.⁵⁶³ Lloyd George linked his own sympathy for Zionism and interest in the Holy Land to his Victorian schooling: 'We had been trained even more in Hebrew history than in the history of our own country... On five days a week in the day school, and on Sunday in our Sunday schools, we were thoroughly versed in the history of the Hebrews'.⁵⁶⁴

Indeed, Barbara Tuchman has proposed that 'the English bible was the single most important factor' behind the Balfour Declaration.⁵⁶⁵ This is somewhat exaggerated; British foreign policy was not directed by sentimentalism alone. A more pragmatic argument for British cabinet minister's interest in Zionism, put forward by Mayir Verete, was a British desire to control Palestine.⁵⁶⁶ The Sykes–Picot Agreement between Britain and France in 1916 had divided up the

⁵⁶¹ For British Imperialism and Zionism see Mayir Verete, 'The Balfour Declaration and its Makers', *Middle Eastern Studies*, vi (1970), pp48-76. For rivalry with Germany see Isaiah Friedman, *The Question of Palestine, 1914-1918: British-Jewish-Arab Relations* (Routledge, London 1973)

⁵⁶² For more on Weizmann's Zionist activities during the war see Chaim Weizmann, *Trial and Error*

⁵⁶³ *Ibid*, p.194

⁵⁶⁴ Lloyd George address to the Jewish Historical Society of England 19125 cited in Eitan Bar-Yosef, *The Holy Land in English Culture 1799-1917: Palestine and the Question of Orientalism* (Clarendon Press, Oxford 2005) p.182

⁵⁶⁵ Barbara Tuchman, *Bible and Sword: England and Palestine from the Bronze Age to Balfour* (Alvin Redman, London 1957), p.xiii. For an updated assessment of Zionism and the British Bible, see Bar-Yosef, *The Holy Land in English Culture*

⁵⁶⁶ See Verete, *The Balfour Declaration and its Makers*, pp.48-76

Middle East into spheres of influence between the two powers, but had left Palestine unattributed to either. A British-sponsored Zionist project to recover and resettle Palestine would leave Britain in a favourable position of leverage in the area. A further advantage would be a major coup in Britain's propaganda war against Germany. The German government actively courted Jewish opinion in neutral U.S.A and enemy Russia during the war, and even considered assisting their Ottoman ally in the creation of a protectorate over a Jewish Palestine.⁵⁶⁷ The Balfour Declaration was designed to beat the Germans to it, and to secure regional dominance to boot.⁵⁶⁸ As Verete argued, Zionism legitimized the British invasion of 1917 and 'wrested it from potential inclusion in la Syrie integrate, already allotted to France under the terms of the treaty [Sykes-Picot]'.⁵⁶⁹

Mark Levene has suggested a more cynical and perhaps sinister explanation for the British government's conversion to the Zionist cause: that senior Whitehall officials believed Anglo-Jewry to be an untrustworthy entity which could only be 'won over' with the carrot of a Jewish Homeland to curb 'powerful pro-German' sympathies.⁵⁷⁰ Accusations of anti-Entente sentiment on the behalf of Anglo-Jewry occurred at the outbreak of the war and lingered on in occasional press sniping throughout the war. Certain Foreign Office records reveal individual Whitehall officials believed English Jews put Jewish interests before national ones.⁵⁷¹ The co-signatory of the Sykes-Picot agreement Mark Sykes did indeed see Zionism as the way to win over such potential fifth columnists: 'If the Zionists think the proposal is good enough they will want us to win, they will do their best which means a) calm their activities in Russia b) pessimism in Germany c) stimulate in France, England and Italy d) enthuse in the USA. This will be subconscious, unwritten and wholly atmospheric'.⁵⁷² This

⁵⁶⁷ Friedman, *The Question of Palestine*, p.309

⁵⁶⁸ Levene, *The Balfour Declaration*, p.55

⁵⁶⁹ Verete, *The Balfour Declaration and its Makers*, pp.48-76

⁵⁷⁰ Levene, *The Balfour Declaration*, p.65

⁵⁷¹ PRO, FO 371/2445/155, Pares-Oliphant interview and Pares to FO, 22 June 1915; Washburn to

Buchanan, 16 July, encl. in Buchanan to Cecil, 6 Aug., 1915. Ibid. 371/2744/4039, Knox to Oliphant,

10 Feb. 1916

⁵⁷² PRO, FO 880/381 (Nicolson Papers), Sykes to Nicolson, 18 Mar. 1916

carried clear antisemitic overtones in the implication that collective Jewish power wielded political control over foreign governments.

However, a case can equally be made representing the Balfour Declaration as a testament to the trusting cooperation between the English Zionist Federation and Whitehall officials, as well as the pragmatic reality of British policy-making. The Balfour Declaration was in effect a combination of British geopolitical strategic opportunism, the culmination of a strong tradition of British non-Jewish Zionism since the 19th century, and a propaganda initiative to mollify American Jewry. Of more importance here is the effect the Declaration had on the established Jewish community of London, already badly fractured by the divisive issue of political Zionism. The endorsement of Zionism was met by the *Jewish Chronicle* with undisguised triumphalism. Under the headline 'A Jewish Triumph' the paper declared 'With one step the Jewish cause has made a great bound forward. The declaration of his Majesty's Government as to the future of Palestine in relation to the Jewish people marks a new epoch for our race', before adding a rather unveiled warning to anti-Zionists 'We cannot imagine that loyal British subjects, and those who proclaim themselves loyal Jews to boot, will continue their attitude of hostility towards Jewish national strivings in face of the Government statement'.⁵⁷³ However, far from being cowed by the British Government's endorsement, the anti-Zionists regrouped and revived their determination to deflect and diminish the prominence of Jewish nationalism within British Jewry. A mere week after the Balfour Declaration a new group, the League of British Jews, was formed consisting of almost the entirety of Jewish anti-Zionist in Britain. Whilst the group totalled at its height no more than 1,300 members compared to the 25,000 members boasted by the EZF in 1918, the prestige and social standing of its members lent the group prominence in the eyes of the British public and Government, and the League used this influence to water down the terms of the Government's commitment to Zionism in the Balfour Declaration.⁵⁷⁴

⁵⁷³ *JC*, 9 November 1917

⁵⁷⁴ For a more in depth discussion on the continued repercussions of the conflict between the Zionists and anti-Zionists after the Balfour Declaration and into the inter war period see Alderman, *British Jewry*, pp.248-261.

Ultimately however, the underlying aims of the anti-Zionists during and after the war was for control of the British public's image and perception of British Jewry's war aims. For patriotic English Jews, the implication that the Jewish community was engaged in the war effort for the cause of Jewish nationalism threatened to undermine the patriotic efforts and sacrifice of the 40,000 Jews serving in the British Army, and gave further ammunition to those within the British press and public questioning Jewish loyalty to Britain's war cause. This concept - that opposition to Zionism was driven primarily in protection of the image of Jewish-British patriotism - will form the basis of the discussions in chapter three on established Jewry's reactions towards, and opposition against, the Jewish Battalion scheme.

Conclusion

The rigours of four years of war severely challenged the small anglicised component of London's Jewish community. The high proportion of Jews who served in the wartime British Army relative to the size of the community, and the award of over 1,500 military honours and decorations was a powerful source of Jewish pride in the interwar period. However, the patriotism displayed by West End Jewry during the war was elevated in its intensity by two interrelated motivations. Firstly, to prevent the repetition of the accusations of Jewish disloyalty raised during the Boer War and which the pre-First World War criticisms of the Anglo-Russian alliance threatened to revive. And secondly, to deflect attention from the disinterested reaction to the war of the Jewish East End, which appeared to confirm the failure of the Jewish leadership's assimilationist policies before the war, and now threatened to undermine the patriotism and position of the Jewish community as a whole. Both of these factors were driven ultimately by British nationalism. War during the period 1899-1918 had a profound impact on British society and on notions of national identity. The frailties of British manhood and military power exposed by the Boer War produced furious debate on the necessity for improved defence at the expense of constitutional rights that were still brewing in the summer of 1914.

On the one hand, the period 1914-1918 witnessed a persistent denigration of the Jewish war effort within certain circles of the British press and public that was comfortably matched, if not exceeded, by praise for the sacrifice of Jewish soldiers and the accomplishments and patriotism of Jewish statesman on the other. In this regards the war exposed the continuation of the British public's perception of Jewish 'differentness' the bulk of West End Jewry wished to escape from.

The issue and experience of military service forced to the surface pre-existing tensions between Jews and non-Jews, in which concepts of identity and loyalty played an important role.⁵⁷⁵ For many Jewish recruits such as Paul Epstein and Jacob Plotzker, the act of soldiering provided an opportunity to disprove old stereotypes of cowardliness and physical weakness attached to Jewish manhood.⁵⁷⁶ On the whole the majority of interactions between Jews and non-Jews in the Army were characterised by congeniality and cooperation. However incidents of prejudice against Jews in the army in the First World War, where they did occur, dimmed the patriotism of British Jews who experienced it. Patriotic Englishman Henry Myer felt a diminished enthusiasm for Britain's war aims due to suffering antisemitic slurs in the ranks. Myer had eschewed his Jewish identity almost entirely, signing up as an Englishmen of Jewish birth. However, his diary and letters from 1917-1919 make clear his contentment and ease serving amongst 'fellow Jews', free from the everyday petty discrimination Jews occasionally suffered during their service.

Away from the trenches, the declaration of support for a Jewish homeland made by Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour in November 1917 was greeted with a mixture of relief and resentment within established Jewry. British motivations can be described as ambivalent at best: an idealised sentimentalism towards the Holy Land amongst many of the leading British protagonists. At worst, the Balfour Declaration was a cynical attempt to sway world Jewish opinion behind the Entente and to exert British control over a strategic region in the Middle East. the Balfour Declaration in isolation reveals the influence West End Jews had on the direction of Whitehall policy by the end of the war, but the issue of

⁵⁷⁵ Lloyd, *Jews under Fire*, p.234

⁵⁷⁶ Letters and diary of Private Paul Epstein 1918-19, AJA MS 124.

political Zionism dangerously polarised the Jewish establishment and for many West End Jews the cause of Jewish nationalism threatened to overshadow the British patriotism that defined their individual commitments to Britain's war cause.

Chapter three will extend the issues raised in this chapter regarding the impact of Zionism on concepts of Jewish identity through an examination of the socio-political impact of the Jewish Battalions on London Jewry. The Jewish Battalions, like the Balfour Declaration, threatened to link established Jewry's war effort with a Zionist project. However, the scheme would also appeal to many non-Zionist Jews, such as Lord Rothschild, through the potential of the project to solve the controversy that was threatening to engulf London Jewry as a whole: the Russian Jewish conscription crisis.

CHAPTER THREE

The Jewish Battalion: Russian Jewry and the Conscription Crisis

Introduction

By the summer of 1917 the controversy surrounding the non-enlistment of 30,000 Russian Jews had become a major issue for both the established and immigrant Jewish communities of London. Having looked at how this issue impacted on both communities separately, it is the aim of this chapter to examine how the proposed solution to the conscription crisis - the establishment of the first Jewish-only battalions in the British Army - would intrinsically link the communal day-to-day politics of both East and West End Jewry. Chapters one and two have shown how both the established and immigrant Jewish communities of London to a large extent experienced separate narratives of the 1914-18 conflict. This chapter will build on the assessments made in the previous chapters of both 'East End' and 'West End' Jewry's response to the war through an examination of both communities' connection to the Jewish Battalion experiment. Whilst the Jewish Battalion scheme would highlight the divisions existing between established and immigrant Jewry in wartime London, it would also demonstrate how to a large extent the wartime fortunes of both were intrinsically linked. The Jewish Battalion saw East End Jewish privates serving under West End Jewish officers. The scheme was supported by Zionists from both communities, including such disparate groups as the Conjoint Foreign Committee and the Foreign Jews Protection Committee, albeit for vastly different motives. West and East End Jews were also linked through a mutual experience of British

hostility, both at a local and national level. Ultimately the Jewish Battalion existed only as a result of the unit's usefulness as an instrument of British foreign policy, and as a convenient method to solve the Russian Jewish conscription crisis in 1917. How Britain dealt with Jewish soldiers in her armed forces during the First World War is a central theme of this thesis and will be looked at in detail through the subject of the Jewish Battalion.

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The deepening controversy over the Russian conscription crisis in the summer of 1917 resulted in two radical government attempts to solve the issue. The Anglo-Russian Military Convention of July 1917 tacitly presented Russian Jews of military age a stark choice between enlisting in the British Army, with the vague assurance of citizenship upon the cessation of hostilities, or deportation back to Russia to serve in the armed forces of the Provisional Government. Many Russian Jews eager to return to Russia to support the embryonic democracy had already left in the period since February. It has been estimated as few as 2,000 Russian men of military age departed Britain as part of the Convention in September 1917 out of the 30,000 Russian Jews of military age residing in Britain.⁵⁷⁷

The second Government initiative to solve the question of the Russian Jewish conscription crisis came in the sanctioning of a British Army unit comprising solely of Jewish soldiers. The units were heralded at the time as the first Jewish fighting force since the Maccabees 2,000 years previously, although Jewish units had been recruited in various conflicts between this period, whilst the Ottoman Empire had considered recruiting a Jewish unit in the early months of the war in 1914.⁵⁷⁸ Indeed, the British decision was motivated in part by the fear

⁵⁷⁷ For figures on the Conventionists see Lipman, *A history of The Jews in Britain*, p.146; also Kadish, *Bolsheviks and British Jews*, p.223

⁵⁷⁸ This was incorrect. A Jewish unit had been recruited in Poland in 1794 to fight against Russia, and as will be discussed the Zion Mule Corps acted as precursor to the Jewish Battalion in 1915/1916. However the claim proved a powerful recruiting tool and was generally believed.

Germany was about to recruit a Jewish unit of its own, and potentially monopolise world Jewish support to her cause. Named the 38th Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers but known colloquially as 'The Judeans', the unit officially came into existence in August 1917. This decision reversed three years of Government feet-dragging over the idea of a Jewish unit and must be looked at in parallel with the support given by Lloyd George's cabinet later that autumn for the establishment of a future Jewish homeland in Palestine, as discussed already at the end of chapter two. As will be seen in this chapter, the British Government's attitude to the Regiment went little beyond a sentimentalism for Judaism within the Protestant British tradition and a pragmatic grasp of the propaganda value of such a unit in winning over world Jewish opinion. Lloyd George's war government contained several key members with sincere Zionist sympathies.⁵⁷⁹ The decision however, like the Balfour Declaration, conveniently solved a contentious wartime Jewish issue, specifically the Government's dilemma of how to deal with the 30,000 Russian Jews residing in Britain who were not serving in either the British or Russian armed forces.⁵⁸⁰ The government perceived, or at least hoped, the prospect of fighting with their fellow co-religionists for the recovery of the Jewish homeland represented a more compelling fighting cause than for 'King and Country', a concept which for many non-naturalised Jews simply did not compute.

Whitehall also consistently failed to comprehend the impact within the British Jewish community of such an overt endorsement of Zionism. Politically, the Jewish Battalion split open the divisions within Anglo-Jewry already emerging from the war, further eroding the position of the Jewish elite to provide Jews in Britain with effective wartime leadership. Supporters such as Lord Rothschild argued that the Jewish Battalion was an opportunity for British Jews to gain collective glory and to serve without fear of experiencing antisemitism within the ranks.⁵⁸¹ Opponents, including the Jewish journalist Lucien Wolf, countered that the whole scheme would be a disaster, tainting the contribution of Jewish

⁵⁷⁹ James Renton, *The Zionist Masquerade: the Birth of the Anglo-Zionist Alliance 1914-1918* (Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke 2007)

⁵⁸⁰ Cesarani, *An Embattled Minority*, p.66

⁵⁸¹ Mentor, *JC*, 16 September 1914

soldiers already serving in France and opening up Jews as a whole to the old accusations of special treatment and cowardice.⁵⁸²

The scheme was far from popular within the immigrant communities, where many saw it as another attempt to trick them out of their hard fought livelihoods based on the wartime boost to the tailoring trade.⁵⁸³ As this chapter will explore, there was violent opposition even within Zionist circles, particularly from the leading Zionist organisation in the East End Paole Zion, and the FJPC. The latter, formed to oppose forced recruitment of Jews in the East End, bitterly campaigned against the formation of any unit comprised of forcibly enlisted Russian Jews. Sharman Kadish was therefore largely correct in her assertion that the controversies and debates surrounding the establishment of the Jewish regiment cannot be interpreted in the classic 'West End' versus 'East End' narrative of London Jewish politics.⁵⁸⁴ In this sense, the Jewish Battalion blurred the differences between the two communities, with supporters and opponents of the scheme represented on both sides. However, in another sense, the Jewish Battalion brought both established and immigrant Jews in London into greater personal proximity to each other. This closer physical interaction often resulted in hostility and conflict, seen particularly in the ill-fated Anglo-Jewish recruitment drives of the East End to fill the Battalion's ranks. However the unit also generated cooperation and improved communication between East and West End Jews. This can be seen in the mix of English Jewish officers and Russian Jewish privates within the battalion, despite the diametrically opposed routes taken to their eventual service in the Jewish units - the former as volunteers and the latter mostly reluctant conscripts. The successful realisation of the Jewish Battalion scheme ultimately rested on the collaboration of Zionists from both divides of the London Jewish spectrum.

An important element of the Jewish Battalion story that must be taken into consideration is the element of chance and uncertainty involved in its creation. As will be seen the Battalion faced many obstacles in its development and benefited from fortuitous circumstances without which it would never have got

⁵⁸² Leo Wolf letter to Herbert Montgomery, 22 May 1916. PRO FO 371 2835/98116

⁵⁸³ Eugene C. Black, *Social Politics of Anglo-Jewry*, p.374

⁵⁸⁴ Sharmin Kadish, *Bolsheviks and British Jews: The Anglo-Jewish Community, Britain and the Russian Revolution* (Frank Cass, London 1992) p.223

off the ground. Therefore an examination of long term trends within intra-communal Jewish and Jewish/non-Jewish relations to explain its existence are of limited value. The Jewish Battalion idea faced major opposition from all sides of the Jewish community and its passage into reality was not to be achieved by forging consensus on the issue amongst the opposing forces, rather than by the peculiar circumstances of 1917. The formation of David Lloyd George's pro-Zionist War cabinet; the Russian Revolution; American entry into the war on the side of the Entente; the crumbling position of the Turkish forces in Palestine; and, most pressingly, the culmination of the controversy created by the non-enlistment of the immigrant Jewish population.

In total there were three main 'Jewish' battalions in the Fusiliers, the 38th consisting of mostly British based recruits, the 39th almost exclusively recruited in North America, and the 40th battalion recruited amongst the Jewish population of Palestine.⁵⁸⁵ The Jewish Battalions have been identified as an important catalyst for Jewish nationalism, particularly amongst the American and Canadian volunteers who joined the 39th Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers in 1918. Whilst the East London Jewish recruits lacked the collective zeal for Zionism of their fellow North American combatants, the cause of Jewish nationalism was an important motivation for some London recruits and direct consequence for others of their service in the unit. Although the fact that only about 2,000 immigrant Jews enlisted in the various Jewish Battalions casts doubt on the power of Jewish patriotism to stimulate a displaced ethnic group to fight voluntarily, the significance of the Jewish Battalion cannot solely be attested by the number of its combatants.⁵⁸⁶ For Vladimir Jabotinsky, the Russian Jew who most energetically campaigned for the creation of a Jewish Battalion, the symbolic power of the Battalion took precedence over its

⁵⁸⁵ For an account of the American and Canadian volunteers in the 39th Battalion see Michael Keren & Shlomit Keren, *We are Coming, Unafraid: The Jewish Legions and the Promised Land in the First World War* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Plymouth 2010) (for the most part the use of 'Jewish Battalion' in this chapter will be in reference to the 38th Battalion, unless specifically stated otherwise)

⁵⁸⁶ Figures from Michael Adler, *The Jews of the Empire and the Great War* (Hodder and Stoughton, London 1919)

substance.⁵⁸⁷ This is revealed in the unit's ability to inspire a Jewish nationalism in the likes of the Whitechapel-born poet Isaac Rosenberg and Westminster educated Anglo-Jewish Officer William Myer, neither of whom expressed a previous affiliation or interest in Zionism.⁵⁸⁸ The enthusiastic response the Battalion received on its march through Whitechapel in February 1918 demonstrates that popular support for its existence should not be judged only through active service.⁵⁸⁹

Ultimately, the Jewish Battalion was instrumental in transforming Jewish politics in the capital during and after the conflict. An all-Jewish regiment was at odds with the discreet policy of integration the Anglo-Jewish leadership had followed since emancipation in 1858, and also threatened to define Anglo-Jewry's response to the war, distracting attention from the above average enlistment of English Jews since August 1914.⁵⁹⁰ The Jewish Battalion reveals how far the attitudes towards the war of the immigrant and integrated groups had diverged by the later stages of the conflict. The brain child of a Russian Jewish journalist working within a burgeoning East London Zionist network and its ranks filled by immigrant Jews – the majority not as volunteers but as reluctant conscripts – the Jewish Battalion was the antithesis of the proud assertion made by the *Jewish Chronicle* at the beginning of the war: 'We Jews are serving in the King's Forces at this time of strife and strain for the Empire shoulder to shoulder with our British fellow-citizens without distinction of race or creed'.⁵⁹¹ This chapter will examine how the Jewish Battalion experiment further accelerated the development of two distinct communities rather than one united and under the leadership of Anglo-Jewry.

⁵⁸⁷ Renton, *Zionist Masquerade*, p.220

⁵⁸⁸ Ian Parsons (Ed.), *The Collected Works of Isaac Rosenberg: Poetry, Prose, Letters, Paintings and Drawings* (Chatto and Windus, London 1979); Myer, *Soldiering of sorts*

⁵⁸⁹ *JC*, 3 Feb 1918

⁵⁹⁰ Feldman, *Englishmen and Jews*, p.16; V. D Lipman puts the proportion of the Jewish population serving in the war at 13%, above the national average of 11%. However Mark Levene questions the veracity of Lipman's figures on the basis of certain duplications of numbers arising from inaccuracies contained in Adler's official post war figures, and states that Jewish enlistment was average at best. See Lipman, *History of the Jews in Britain*; Mark Levene, 'Going against the Grain: Two Jewish Memoirs of War and Anti—War, 1914–18', *Jewish Culture and History*, 2:2, (1999) pp.66-95

⁵⁹¹ *JC*, 2 October 1914; p.5

Considering the contemporary impact of the Jewish Battalion on the communal politics of Anglo-Jewry and its symbolic importance within the Zionist tradition as an early forerunner of the modern Israeli Army, the historiography of the topic is surprisingly sparse. There are only five major histories of the Jewish Battalion since 1922, of which three were written by former soldiers. The Irish Protestant commander of the 38th Battalion, John Henry Patterson, published his account in 1922, *With the Judeans in the Palestine Campaign*.⁵⁹² His career in the British Army suffered from his involvement with and subsequent unyielding support for the Jewish Battalion scheme, and his account is prone to hyperbolic rhetoric concerning the military achievements of the unit. However his account of the meetings between supporters and opponents of the project in the summer of 1917 are highly revealing of the extent to which the Jewish Battalion was a critically divisive issue within Anglo-Jewish communal politics.⁵⁹³ Vladimir Jabotinsky's *The Story of the Jewish Legion* – published posthumously in 1945 – displays the uncompromising attitude of the unit's leading supporter regarding the ultimate importance of the scheme, and how desperately wrong anyone who dared disagree with him was. Despite the partisan nature of the work, Jabotinsky's accounts of his recruitment drives within the East End are illuminating in the attitude of Jewish youth towards not only the Jewish Battalion but their apathy for both Jewish and British society generally.⁵⁹⁴ Summarising the attitudes of Jewish East Enders in the autumn of 1915, Jabotinsky reflected 'The East End neither loves nor hates: the East End has no attitude at all either to countries or to classes'.⁵⁹⁵ This chapter will assess the validity of this statement, questioning why so few Russian Jews enlisted for war service, and the extent to which service in the Jewish Battalion transformed the self-imposed exclusion from British and Jewish society of the East End recruits that served in it.

Former recruit Elias Gilner's 1966 *War and Hope: a History of the Jewish Legion*⁵⁹⁶ builds on Paterson and Jabotinsky's contributions but it wouldn't be

⁵⁹² J.H Patterson, *With the Judeans in the Palestine Campaign* (Hutchinson & Co, London 1922)

⁵⁹³ Ibid p.19

⁵⁹⁴ Jabotinsky, *Jewish Legion*

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid. p.61

⁵⁹⁶ Elias Gilner, *War and Hope: a History of the Jewish Legion* (Herzl, New York 1969)

until Martin Watts' comprehensive 2004 history, *The Jewish Legion and the First World War*⁵⁹⁷, that the first non-partisan history of the unit was published. Watts' account places the Jewish soldiers' experience in the broader context of military recruitment policy, Zionist politics, and Anglo-Jewry as a whole, and is a good addition to the study of minorities in war-time. In his assessment of the social impact of the battalions on the East End, Martin Watts drew from the testimonials written by Jewish Battalion veterans held at the Jewish Legion Museum in Avichail, Israel. Watts broadly concludes from these testimonials that Zionism was neither a strong motivating factor for joining the unit amongst East London recruits, nor did service in the battalions encourage any particular interest in Jewish nationalism.⁵⁹⁸ In researching the history of the Jewish Battalion for the purposes of this thesis, I have visited and assessed in detail the testimonial records at Avichail, and the experiences and motivations of these recruits will be examined here in section five: 'The Jewish Battalions in Action: War Experience and Jewish masculinity'. This section will question Watts' assertion of the limited role Zionism played in the connection to the Jewish Battalion of the East End recruits. The testimonials reveal a complex picture: whilst coercion played a dominant role in the enlistment of most East London Jews, a high number of the soldiers of that unit expressed a later interest in and involvement with Zionism which can be directly linked to their experiences serving in the Jewish Battalions in Palestine. These experiences of active service detailed in the testimonials at Avichail will also be more broadly compared to those of English Jewish soldiers assessed in chapter two. Integrated and immigrant Jewish soldiers fighting in the British Army may have had contrasting routes to the front line, but their experiences of ethnic prejudice and religious discomfiture during military service are broadly analogous, and can be compared directly to the experiences of other colonial troops fighting for the British Empire during the conflict.⁵⁹⁹

⁵⁹⁷ Watts, *The Jewish Legion*

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid pp.130-131

⁵⁹⁹ See Richard Smith, *Jamaican Volunteers in the First World War: Race, Masculinity and the Development of National Consciousness* (Manchester University Press, Manchester 2004). See also David Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War: Soldiers' Letters, 1914-1918* (Macmillan Press LTD, Basingstoke 1999)

The most recent major study on the Jewish Battalions is Shlomit and Michael Keren's 2010 study *We are Coming, Unafraid: The Jewish Legions and the Promised Land*.⁶⁰⁰ Whilst focusing primarily on the American and Canadian Jews who served in the 39th battalion, the authors conclude that for many Jews serving in all three Battalions during the war, the act of serving in the British Army and the first-hand experience of antisemitism strengthened the recruits' identity as Jews.⁶⁰¹

As with the Anglo-Jewish experience of the First World War in general, the Jewish Battalions that served in the British Army are usually mentioned only in passing, if at all, in most histories of the community in the 20th Century. Geoffrey Alderman in his substantial 1992 history *Modern British Jewry* refers briefly to the Jewish Regiment in a footnote, describing Jewish integrationists' opposition to the Regiment in line with the larger failure of the Board of Deputies and other Anglo-Jewish institutions of providing wartime support for the immigrant community: 'preservation of image was to override that of religious or ethnic solidarity'.⁶⁰² Sharman Kadish alludes rather more to the Battalion in her work of the same year *Bolsheviks and British Jews: The Anglo-Jewish Community, Britain and the Russian Revolution*, discussing the divergent reactions across the Jewish community to the unit and how 'the generally accepted pattern of communal politics broke down' over it.⁶⁰³ Kadish reveals the critical impact of the Russian Revolution in enticing many of the most vociferous and radical East End opponents of Jabotinsky back to Russia in the spring and summer of 1917, greatly reducing organised resistance within the immigrant communities to the Jewish Regiment scheme.⁶⁰⁴ Todd Endelman makes no mention of the Jewish Regiment in his major works encompassing the First World War⁶⁰⁵ and David Cesarani in his 1982 article *Embattled Minority: The Jews in Britain during the First World War* only briefly considers the issue despite its contemporary impact on Jewish politics and social relations. Cesarani concludes that 'The unit did little to alter popular perceptions

⁶⁰⁰ Keren, *We are Coming, Unafraid*

⁶⁰¹ Ibid, p.10

⁶⁰² Alderman, *Modern British Jewry*, p.241

⁶⁰³ Kadish, *Bolsheviks British Jews*, p.223

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid p.227

⁶⁰⁵ Todd Endelman, *Radical Assimilation in English Jewish History 1656-1945* (Indiana University Press, Indianapolis 1990). See also Endelman, *The Jews of Britain*

of the Jews', viewing the legacy of the Battalion as part of one narrative regarding the primacy of virulent British antisemitism during the War to the long standing detriment of the Jewish community.⁶⁰⁶

The limited military contribution to the fabric of the First World War and its marginalisation from community politics after its disbandment perhaps explains the often cursory treatment of the Jewish Regiment story within the larger narrative of the Jewish communities of Britain in the First World War. This chapter seeks to show that the Battalion did indeed have a lasting impact on social and political relations within the Jewish community that continued to be felt long after its official disbandment in 1922, not least by the men who served in it. The Jewish Battalion experience reveals the complexity of the Jewish reaction and involvement in the conflict. The official *Jewish Book of Honour*, written by Reverend Michael Adler in 1922 as a testament to the war record of Jews in Britain, praises 'the Judeans' as dutiful British citizens patriotically upholding the values of Anglo-Jewry.⁶⁰⁷ In contrast the founder of the Battalion Vladimir Jabotinsky saw in it the emergence of a specifically Jewish national identity committed to legitimizing the Zionist claim in Palestine.⁶⁰⁸ The controversy surrounding the Jewish Battalion scheme ultimately centred on the issue of identity: whether Anglo-Jewry was going to fight the war as Englishmen and women or as Jews, and how the British press and public perceived a split identity in the context of Jewish only units. The clash between opponents of the Battalion who saw it accentuating unwanted Jewish 'differentness' and its supporters who saw its true purpose as a tool of Jewish nationalism, was to decisively polarise the Jewish establishment and leave it unable to provide the effective leadership the Jewish community needed to weather the storm of war.

This chapter will also examine in greater detail the Russian Jewish experience of military service in the British Army. The attitudes towards and experience of life in the British Army for Russian Jews will be assessed and set against those of West End Jewish soldiers discussed in chapter two. These Russian Jewish perspectives on soldiering will also be compared more broadly

⁶⁰⁶ Cesarani, *Embattled Minority*, p.72

⁶⁰⁷ Adler, *The Jews of the Empire*, P.IX

⁶⁰⁸ Jabotinsky, *Jewish Legion*, pp.180-181

to the motivations for enlistment of English soldiers from the East End. It will be shown that Russian Jews held a distinctly more ambivalent attitude towards military service than West End Jewish soldiers and English soldiers more generally. This was based on an ingrained hatred of militarism associated with military service under the Tsars and an indifference derived from belonging to a transitional community on the periphery of British society. However this chapter will also show that some Russian Jews did enlist before the enforcement of the Anglo-Russian Military Convention, and for those that did serve in the Jewish Battalions, many returned home with a new British patriotism created by their part in Britain's victory. Indeed, the first section of this chapter will discuss how the British Government potentially missed an opportunity of engaging and enlisting a spontaneous popular enthusiasm for Britain's war cause amongst Russian Jewish males in the late summer and autumn of 1914.

XIV. The 'Jewish Regiment' of 1914

A few short weeks after Britain's declaration of war on Germany, The *Jewish Chronicle* summarised a letter from one of its readers, a certain Mr. F. Simpson, who suggested 'The formation of an essentially Jewish corps, as a Jewish expression of loyalty and appreciation of England.' He went on to add that 'a number of his acquaintances are willing to join such a corps and look to the lead of the more important members of the metropolitan community.'⁶⁰⁹ This was typical of the early sentiment surrounding the idea of a Jewish unit: that such a unit would demonstrate unconditionally the community's British patriotism; that there was popular support for the idea; and that its success depended on the enthusiasm and leadership of the Anglo-Jewish elite. This focus on an expression of loyalty and commitment to Britain was not however universally accepted amongst the demographic intended to fill its ranks: Russian Jewish males. As has previously been discussed in chapter one, many of the immigrant Jews residing in London and other urban centres felt little affiliation with Britain or sense of Britishness. They were in the most part, as Paul Ward has stated, 'refugees looking for temporary asylum, not...

⁶⁰⁹ JC, 21 August 1914, p.11

immigrants seeking to establish new lives'.⁶¹⁰ Many regarded London as a stop-off on route to America, taking work to pay for the second part of their journey and 'spoke little or no English, dressed visibly differently from other people in Britain, and sought to ease the trauma of their migration through living in areas already inhabited by previous Jewish migrants'.⁶¹¹ In addition, they harboured a deep hatred of militarism and the Tsarist state they had fled persecution from and to whom Britain was now allied to.

All of this did not necessarily bar the community from embracing and being swept up in patriotic enthusiasm for a British military cause, as can be seen in the revelry described by the *Jewish Chronicle* in Brick Lane at the relief of Mafeking in May 1900: 'The greatest display of flags were in the [Brick] "Lane". Every stall, every barrow had its flag. One could get 'Mafeking fish', 'Mafeking oranges' and 'Mafeking lemons', cakes I'kovod Mafeking and what not. Everything was being sold in honour of Mafeking and, every minute or so, one could hear patriotic airs being sung and played; the Yiddish bands....being greatly in demand, and reaping a 'coppery' harvest for their selection of patriotic music. All were happy. The sentence 'Mafeking is relieved' was like an abracadabra, opening the way to joy, levelling rich and poor, ending the terrible anxiety. 'Mafeking relieved. Mazzeltov, Mazzeltov.'⁶¹²

The Jewish population of East London displayed an enthusiastic support for Britain's imperial position in similar fashion to the Gentile population and equal to -if not in excess of - the response of established British Jewry.⁶¹³ Given the prevailing evidence of little or no particular attachment to national life in the context of day-to-day existence, the Mafeking celebrations demonstrate the paradox and ambiguity involved in defining how transitional communities react to national events and spontaneous demonstrations of patriotism. Such 'patriotic' displays must be interpreted cautiously. An element of self-interest no doubt lay behind the celebrations, seen most notably in the commercialisation of the event through the selling of 'Mafeking' products, although this was a

⁶¹⁰ Ward, *Britishness since 1870*, p.119

⁶¹¹ Ibid p.119

⁶¹² *JC*, May 1900. Cited ibid

⁶¹³ See Introduction of Bar-Yosef *'The Jew' in Late-Victorian and Edwardian Culture* for a discussion of representations of Jewish responses to Mafeking.

widely typical response across the stall markets of Britain and the Empire in 1900.⁶¹⁴ There are clear parallels with the Mafeking celebrations in Brick Lane to other Imperial events in which popular enthusiasm was mobilised in the interests of patriotism and pageantry, most notably the Jubilees for Queen Victoria in 1887 and 1897, and of course the 'Bank Holiday spirit' of the first few days of the Great War.⁶¹⁵

It could be drawn from this that native and immigrant communities alike engage in apparent patriotic revelry that is hard to separate from genuine national enthusiasm and an expression of local or communal patriotism, as well as the more obvious excuse for a celebration.⁶¹⁶ This is important in a discussion of the response to the outbreak of war within the Jewish East End, where there was evidence of relatively strong support for Britain's cause during the first months of the war, and in particular amongst young Jewish men working in the tailoring and textile industries greatly affected by the dislocation of international trade brought by the war. The social and economic implications of this trade slump have already been examined in chapter one. However, unemployment within the East End during the early months of the war had important ramifications for how Russian Jews perceived the prospect of military service. As has been seen with Nicholas Mansfield's research into the motivations of English farmworkers for enlisting during the war, boredom and lack of prospects created by unemployment were powerful motivating factors for young men to enlist in the army.⁶¹⁷

In early autumn 1914 an energetic Jewish army captain active in enlistment campaigns, Captain Webber, attempted to mobilise the interest of East London's Russian Jews by campaigning to recruit 2,000 of them for service in a Jewish unit.⁶¹⁸ At a crowded gathering at the Pavilion Theatre in Whitechapel at

⁶¹⁴ The Canadian Anglo-Boer war museum website has an excellent online collection of the vast memorabilia industry inspired by the conflict and the relief of Mafeking in particular http://www.angloboerwarmuseum.com/Boer01b_collections.html

⁶¹⁵ Gregory, *The Last Great War*, p.13

⁶¹⁶ See Grainger, *Patriotisms*

⁶¹⁷ See Mansfield, *English Farmworkers and Local Patriotism*

⁶¹⁸ Unfortunately given his local prominence and involvement in the early stages of the scheme for Jewish only units there is a lack of background information on Captain Webber in the relevant sources, outside of the few articles in the *Jewish Chronicle* in autumn 1914

the end of August, Webber addressed his audience by playing on their sense of obligation to the country that had sheltered them from persecution, specifically for some in the audience in the aftermath of the Tsarist pogroms in Bialystok, Kishinev and Odessa between 1903-1908.⁶¹⁹ Webber argued that the most effective way to demonstrate this gratitude and disarm any accusations of Jews 'shirking' their duty was to enlist in a British Army battalion specifically made up of their fellow co-religionists, a shining symbol of the immigrant Jewish community's commitment to Britain's cause.⁶²⁰ The *Jewish Chronicle* proudly noted that hundreds of Jews could be found crowding outside the recruitment depot in Whitechapel, 'More English than the English in their expression of loyalty and desire for service'.⁶²¹

Webber's campaign sought to emphasise the 'Jewishness' of the proposed brigade, and printed recruitment posters in Yiddish in favourable publications.⁶²² John Rodker, a member of the eclectic mix of Jewish writers and artists known as the 'Whitechapel Boys'⁶²³, relates an experience typical of the early success of this appeal: 'A Foreign Legion was being enlisted and I liked the name which somehow kept it distinct from the British Army (it seemed exactly right for the foreigner I was) and I put my name down for it in a back room in Soho somewhere, surprised to see it all so very casual'.⁶²⁴ Webber's initiative had support from within the Jewish establishment in the form of the editor of the *Jewish Chronicle*, Leo Greenberg.⁶²⁵ As has been seen in chapter two, Greenberg was a leading English Zionist and was an early proponent of the Jewish Battalion, extolling the virtues of a Jewish unit through his weekly column in the *Jewish Chronicle* and printing unofficial recruitment posters for

used here. Further research in conjunction with the National Archives may uncover service information for his career after this point.

⁶¹⁹ *JC*, 4 September 1914, p.5. For a new interpretation of the nature of these pogroms see Dekel-Chen, *Anti-Jewish Violence*

⁶²⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶²¹ *JC*, 7 August 1914

⁶²² *JC*, 4 September 1914 Recruitment poster on p.4, repeated regularly until the end of the year.

⁶²³ Rachel Dickson and Sarah MacDougall (Eds.) *Whitechapel at War: Isaac Rosenberg and his Circle* (Ben Uri Gallery, London 2008)

⁶²⁴ John Rodker, *Memoirs of Other Fronts* (1932); pp.111-112. It can be safely assumed here that when Rodker uses the word 'foreigner' as he invariably does throughout his memoirs, he really means Jewish. See Dominic Williams, "No History To Speak Of": Jewishness and Modernism In John Rodker's *Memoirs of Other Fronts* (Putnam, London 1932)', *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies*, 9:3,(2010) pp.289-310

⁶²⁵ Cesarani, *Jewish Chronicle and Anglo-Jewry*, pp.116-117

the Battalion as well as advertising the times and places of Webber's meetings.⁶²⁶

For all his energy and organisation, Captain Webber's attempts to enlist 2,000 Russian Jews into a Jewish unit were doomed when the War Office curtly pointed out at the beginning of September that the men could not enlist in the British Army as they were not naturalised citizens.⁶²⁷ Indeed, already previous to this many Russian Jews eager to enlist in the British Army had been refused on the grounds of their nationality. The *Jewish Chronicle* reported on 28 August 1914 that many Russian Jews were being turned away from a recruitment station in Tower Hill: 'A large proportion of the Jewish population of this country are of foreign birth, and as such, are not eligible for enlistment. The recruiting sergeant at Tower Hill mentioned in fact, that an 'enormous lot', of foreign born Jews had come forward but had to be refused on that account'.⁶²⁸ The recruiting sergeant added: 'I had a Russian in this morning...and when I rejected him, he said "why can't you take me? The English troops are going to fight alongside the Russians"'.⁶²⁹

The Government's recruitment infrastructure headed by Lord Kitchener was ill-prepared for the volume of recruits coming in nationally at the beginning of September, and lingering questions over the state of Jewish manhood and the reliability of the men's allegiance to Britain, discussed previously in chapter one, were enough to turn the Government off recruiting foreign Jews at this stage.⁶³⁰ The great confusion that surrounded the issue of Russian Jews' eligibility for service led to disillusionment for many eager recruits turned away, including John Rodker: 'But Kitchener did not want a Foreign Legion, so I was given a letter to the Fusiliers and they were full, and I didn't seem what they wanted, they had the pick in those days, and I was ashamed to have been turned down, or else I wanted the Foreign Legion and nothing else would do, and anyhow the

⁶²⁶ JC, 28 August 1914; 4 September 1914

⁶²⁷ Cesarani, *Jewish Chronicle and Anglo-Jewry*, p.114

⁶²⁸ JC, 28 August 1914

⁶²⁹ Ibid

⁶³⁰ NA, PRO WO 1123

fortnight or so of waiting had given me time to think, and I knew about war, and how inconclusive it had always been.’⁶³¹

In the later stages of the war and particularly after the introduction of conscription in 1916 failed to provide the British Government with the required number of recruits to meet its commitments in all theatres, legislation barring Russian Jews from service in the British Armed Forces would be relaxed. However this untapped early enthusiasm to enlist amongst a sizeable number of East London Jews would haunt the subsequent recruitment drives of those who were to take up Webber’s efforts to enlist Russian Jews into an all-Jewish unit. Supporters of the Jewish regiment idea such as Greenberg continued to devote their efforts towards eliciting a Government endorsement for eligible Jews serving together, but were caught off guard by a committed and vociferous backlash against the scheme from within established Jewry. The Reverend Michael Adler attacked in an open letter to the War Office the proposed regiment as ‘Totally irresponsible’ and having ‘Received no countenance whatever from any influential member of the Jewish community. The matter has been carefully considered both by the military and civilian representatives of our community, and they are practically unanimous in deciding that no such Battalion is desirable or necessary’.⁶³²

Numbering among those Adler would have consulted were Edmund Sebag-Montefiore (the War Office liaison officer with the Jewish community) and Denzil Myers (London Jewry’s chief recruiting agent), and therefore his views were guaranteed weight within the War Office.⁶³³ The Jewish Regiment proposal split established Jewry, revealing the community no longer spoke as a cohesive and centralised body on Jewish issues as it had in the Victorian era. The issue further demonstrated the extent to which political Zionism had infiltrated the upper echelons of established Jewry since the early initiatives of Chovevei Zion in the 1890s, discussed in chapter two.⁶³⁴ For opponents of the scheme, to serve separately from their fellow Englishmen in an exclusively Jewish Battalion would increase the visibility and difference of the community,

⁶³¹ Rodker, *Memoirs of Other Fronts*, p.112

⁶³² Reprinted in the *JC* 6 November 1914

⁶³³ Cesarani, *Jewish Chronicle*, p.118

⁶³⁴ Cohen, *English Zionist and British Jews*, p.8

open up accusations of special treatment, and effectively put the visible sum of Jewish war effort into one basket.⁶³⁵

Predictably, Greenberg was furious with Adler's 'meddling', particularly his temerity in speaking for the community as a whole, and stepped up his own campaign for a Jewish Battalion, arguing it was more necessary than ever following a spate of antisemitic cases at recruitment centres, most notably in Hackney in October.⁶³⁶ The Hackney incident has already been touched on in chapter two in a discussion of the prevalence of antisemitism in the British Army, but it is worth returning briefly to the thoughts of the recruiting officer at Hackney in the aftermath of the violence: 'Since then however, a good many thoroughly patriotic Jews were so anxious to enlist that, without any declaration of religion, they were recruited. When their religion became known, they were allowed to remain because they were numerous enough to protect themselves... what we intend to do is to form them into a special platoon of their own'.⁶³⁷ It is interesting to note here that the local military authorities were quick to propose the suggestion of the segregation of Jewish troops, primarily for their own protection. For Greenberg, the battalion would be a unit of Jewish strength and a tool to combat antisemitism within the British Army, and, almost as importantly, would demonstrate Jewish martial abilities in a collective and visible way. As a letter addressed to Greenberg and printed in the *Jewish Chronicle* in November 1914 put it 'Personally, I believe the greatest opportunity occurs since the diaspora, of proving Jewish patriotism and at the same time the virility of the race'.⁶³⁸ The contending parties eventually met face to face at a London hotel on 6 December 1914. The pro-Battalion party led by Greenberg and joined by Dr David Eder and Joseph Cowen, both noted Jewish nationalists, and the anti-Battalion group drawn mainly from the Jewish elite.⁶³⁹ The resulting deadlock convinced the War Office - who had been looking for

⁶³⁵ Correspondence of M. Adler to the War Office reprinted in *JC*, 28 October 1914

⁶³⁶ Several Jewish recruits were turned away from a recruitment centre in Hackney after becoming victims of Anti-Semitic attacks by the other recruits. Reported in *JC*, 9 October 1914

⁶³⁷ *JC*, 9 October 1914. What is unclear from this episode is whether the Jewish volunteers were foreign or British born Jews. However the fact the recruiting station enlisted them would imply they were naturalised British citizens.

⁶³⁸ Mr. M. S Salinger to the Editor, *JC*, 6 November 1914, P.4

⁶³⁹ Cesarani, *Jewish Chronicle*, p.118

strong Jewish leadership to take on the project of making the proposal a reality - that Anglo-Jewish leadership was disunited and that a Jewish battalion was for now an unworkable project.⁶⁴⁰

The cheers, toasts and impressive renditions of the national anthem that followed Captain Webber's speeches at his meetings in the weeks after the declaration of war would appear to demonstrate a tangible, if short-lived, wave of patriotism and identification with Britain's cause amongst the East End Russian Jewish population.⁶⁴¹ It is probable that this was no more than an ephemeral display of enthusiasm that did not outlast the onset of winter and was in line with the passing of the national 'war fever'.⁶⁴² The Russian Jewish population was never again as positive in fighting for Britain and specifically on the prospect of fighting in a Jewish Regiment as it was in the first six weeks of the war. As we saw in chapter one, the profits associated with the 'Khaki Boom' deterred many Russian Jews from enlisting voluntarily after the initial economic slump of the early weeks of the war. In retrospect this period offered an opportunity for the Government and Anglo-Jewish leadership to solve the problem of Russian recruitment at the very beginning of the war. For the Russian Jews whose attempts to enlist were ultimately disappointed by the British Army's stringent naturalisation requirements, it was further confirmation of their position outside of British society, and helped to entrench the wider perception within the Jewish East End that this was not their war to fight.

At this juncture it would be useful to discuss the frequency of and motivations for volunteerism in East London amongst the non-Jewish population, in order to place the attempts by Russian Jews to volunteer into a local context. Voluntary enlistment figures, in East London as in the rest of the country, remains a strong barometer for which to judge popular enthusiasm for the war. The *Eastern Post and City Chronicle* reported on 8 August the swiftness with which East End reservists had re-joined their units, noting also that 'large numbers of men and youths have offered their services to the military authorities, but

⁶⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁴¹ *JC*, 28 August 1914

⁶⁴² Gregory, *The Last Great War*, p.9

unfortunately in most cases their lack of training has been against them'.⁶⁴³ In the last week of July the local newspapers and journals had been consumed predominantly with preparations for the forthcoming bank holiday, as already discussed in the beginning of chapter one. With the declaration of war, domestic concerns were now pushed aside to prioritise war related interest. The East End newspapers in particular focused on the just nature of Britain's cause and the activities of the local Battalions, extolling the new recruits and urging more to step forward.⁶⁴⁴ One particular Battalion which drew significant numbers of men to its ranks, whilst also capturing the imagination of the local population, was the 17th Stepney and Poplar Battalion. The *East End News and London Shipping Chronicle* reported on 7 August that 'the number of recruits presenting themselves at headquarters [Stepney Battalion] has been very large'.⁶⁴⁵ The paper returned to the topic again on 11 August, glowingly referring to the large numbers of men presenting themselves to the recruitment office in Stepney, the correspondent relating that 'one man, I hear, was so anxious to join that he rang the housekeeper up at twelve o'clock midnight. The staff are kept very busy during the day'.⁶⁴⁶

It is hard to accurately extrapolate the recruitment figures for East London, but it would appear that the area, and London as a whole, compared favourably to the rest of the country.⁶⁴⁷ 298,923 men enlisted into the regular army or the territorial force in Britain during the month of August 1914.⁶⁴⁸ 55% of the male population of London of military age enlisted, comparing favourably to Britain as a whole (53%) and to the belligerent capital of Berlin (59%) whose nation did not rely on an ad-hoc voluntary recruitment basis for armed service but on a well cultivated and permanent conscription system.⁶⁴⁹ For London, no doubt assisted by the nine new divisional recruitment offices opened across the city,

⁶⁴³ *The Eastern Post and City Chronicle*, 8 August 1914, p.5.

⁶⁴⁴ Various reports in *The Eastern Post and City Chronicle* and *East London Observer* during the first week of August 1914.

⁶⁴⁵ *East End News and London Shipping Chronicle*, 7 August 1914.

⁶⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 11 August 1914;

⁶⁴⁷ Winter, *Capital Cities at War* p.62

⁶⁴⁸ *Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire During the Great War 1914-1920*. (The War Office. Majesty's Stationary Office, London March 1922)

⁶⁴⁹ Winter, *Capital Cities at War*, p.61

recruitment averaged 1205 men per day.⁶⁵⁰ It is clear that London benefitted from a better defined, broader and officially sanctioned recruiting system than other areas, particularly rural, resulting in greater enlistment figures. Hew Strachan suggests it was the difference in approach to recruitment in London, compared to for instance Sussex, that led to disparity: 'The methods of recruiting employed in rural areas were traditional and paternalist, relying on a sense of deference and obligation rather than on regional links and bonds of friendship'.⁶⁵¹

It is important to factor in the time of year in such urban-countryside comparisons. For many farmers and landowners, getting in the harvest was a priority in the late summer and early autumn of 1914, resulting in a reluctance to allow or encourage farm labourers to enlist in the freer manner of workers in the cities, and the work the harvest provided was an incentive for the farm hands to resist enlisting until it had been brought in.⁶⁵² As a comparison, this would later be mirrored by the reluctance of Russian Jewish tailors to enlist at the expense of the profits to be made during the 'Khaki Boom'. However, as discussed in the context of wartime unemployment in the docklands industry in chapter one, for English workers in East London work prospects were less of a restriction to enlistment. Julia Bush identifies the local economy as a factor behind the recruitment drive: 'In an area like East London, war caused almost immediate economic distress. This fact, combined with the poverty before the war, undoubtedly assisted recruiting. The same newspaper which reported the rush to enlist also reported that food prices were rising steeply'.⁶⁵³

It must be remembered that although London compared well to the countryside and Britain as a whole for enlistment, it was on a par with some urban areas and performed less well than places such as Edinburgh.⁶⁵⁴ It also of interest to note that 260,672 men had volunteered to join up for military

⁶⁵⁰ John Osborne, *The Voluntary Recruitment Movement in Britain 1914-1916* (Garland Publishing Inc., London 1982), p.75

⁶⁵¹ Hugh Strachan, *The First World War. Volume 1: To Arms* (Oxford University Press, Oxford 2001), p.160. For a more detailed analysis of the recruitment process in the countryside during the First World War see Mansfield, *English Farmworkers and Local Patriotism*

⁶⁵² Mansfield, *English Farmworkers and Local Patriotism*

⁶⁵³ Bush, *Behind the Lines*, p.38

⁶⁵⁴ Osborne, *Voluntary Recruiting Movement*, p.75

service in Germany by 11 August 1914, an impressive testament to German patriotism considering the conscription programme already in place.⁶⁵⁵ The recruitment activity in East London, however, and in particular the activity of the Stepney and 17th Poplar Battalion, aroused great popular interest within the local populous and acted as a focal point for East End attitudes towards the war. The tangible form of the soldier an acceptable image between which the fevered agitation, anxiety, wild jingoism and ardent anti-war sentiment from varied interests of the opening days of the war could patriotically compromise.

The *East London Observer* noted the effects of the Battalion's route marches through the district: 'Their appearance on these occasions had made a great impression on the people in the neighbourhood. Native patriotism has been thrilled by the example of these men who have offered themselves to the service of their King and Country'.⁶⁵⁶ Such public drills, albeit necessary scratch exercises for the troops, instilled confidence in the local population whilst encouraging by example non-enlisted men in the area to join up. They also proved particularly uplifting and inspiring to East End children attempting to comprehend the sudden loss to the services of elder brothers and fathers. One resident of the East End, Marsland Gander who was twelve upon the outbreak of the war, recalled later the effect upon his school class of a drill march in full uniform by the West Ham Battalion of the Essex Regiment past his school: 'Forty boys left their desks in a wild scramble for the windows. The form-master, a Mr. Dadlers, smiled indulgently and tugged at his moustache. We glowed with pride and quivered with excitement'.⁶⁵⁷

The imitation of their new soldier 'heroes' by local children reveals a deep inclination or fixation with militarism in Edwardian youth instilled by programmes such as Baden Powell's boy scouts movement and the creation of Boy's Battalions, as already examined in chapter two. The influence of this sentiment and the presence of soldiers in the streets in August 1914 was strong enough to captivate even new arrivals to Britain. Maurice Levinson born in the Russian province of Bessarabia and whose family fled the Tsarist pogroms for East

⁶⁵⁵ Strachan, *The First World War*, p.152

⁶⁵⁶ ELO, 15 August 1914

⁶⁵⁷ Marsland Gander, *After these Many Quests* (Macdonald, London 1949), p.31

London only in 1914, recalled as a child: 'Playing in an East London street with my two brothers. We were walking in single file with a mob of other children, and yelling ourselves hoarse with childish investives against the German Imperial Army'.⁶⁵⁸ This imitation or hero worship of the common soldier represents a strong break with the traditional image and reaction to the profession of soldiery in recent British culture, as has already been related in chapter two.

High enlistment figures however are not necessarily the most reliable source for detailing a locality's patriotism, for while they do reveal a physical commitment to the national cause, they unfortunately do not list the motives upon which the enlisted men have made that commitment. The lack of widespread diary and written record keeping amongst the Edwardian working class has given us very few of these motives, and those that do exist must be carefully scrutinised for the influence of post war attitudes towards the horrors and 'futility' of the war to end all wars.⁶⁵⁹ Albert Conn's account of why he enlisted is strikingly simple and consistent with the attitude of many young men presented with unprecedented times. Conn, from Barking Road Green Gate and under age in 1914, did not hesitate to enlist: 'Joined up myself I did. I went up to the depot of the Poplar and Stepney Rifles, the old 17th CO of London Mob... I don't know what made me do such a thing. I wasn't brave, nothing like that. It's just that I wanted a bit of excitement'.⁶⁶⁰

This kind of sentiment - of excitement and the thrill of adventure over patriotism and defence of king and country - was typical of young men from an area experiencing economic dislocation. However as Nicholas Mansfield has pointed out, this was true in rural regions too.⁶⁶¹ In this regards the yearning for excitement and adventure as a motivator for enlistment matches the sentiments of many West End Jews employed in sedentary and monotonous professions for whom enlistment represented a chance of escapism as much as the opportunity to display patriotic loyalty to Britain. The number of those who

⁶⁵⁸ Maurice Levinson, *The trouble with Yesterday*. (Cedris Chivers LTD, New Portray 1946), p.14

⁶⁵⁹ Mark Connelly, *The Great War, Memory and Ritual: Commemoration in the City and East London, 1916-1939* (The Boydell Press, Woodbridge 2002), p.8

⁶⁶⁰ *Imperial War Museum* (hereafter *IWM*) Conn, A 78/58/1

⁶⁶¹ Mansfield, *English Farmworkers and Local Patriotism*,

enlisted under age is significant, such as Jack Jones of Brick Lane who was ejected from the forces for being underage only to re-enlist in 1917, and William Cotton who managed to enlist in 1914 at only fifteen by lying about his age, again hints at a prevalent militarism within early 20th Century British society.⁶⁶² The lack of employment prospects in an already impoverished East End economy struggling to adjust to the new conditions of wartime was a powerful pull factor into the forces for many men, as was the danger of having too much time on their hands, as Shadwell local Joe Bloomberg's father found out: 'My own father and his friend who lived in the house next door joined up. I believe they were both drunk at the time because they both joined the Royal Scots Fusiliers!'⁶⁶³

Many did also fight for patriotic motives. The aforementioned William Cotton, born in Westminster but a resident of Lime house East London in 1914 and aged only fifteen, relates how a patriotic sermon from a local blacksmith on the heroics of the Boer war, including the bellicose statement 'when Kitchener gets hold of this Kaiser he'll make him wish he had never been born', convinced him and his friends to decide at once to join the forces.⁶⁶⁴ Nevertheless, the widespread exhortations spilling from the local press that the large numbers of volunteers represented a great display of patriotic intent must be treated with caution, and set against a growing suspicion in some quarters of the press that the recruitment figures for East London were in fact not sufficient. The *East London Observer* sceptically stated: 'in view of the nation's need of men, it would be interesting to know how many really able-bodied young men remain in the work houses and infirmaries of the country. You can see a great deal of fraud in this respect as your train passes through East London'.⁶⁶⁵ In fact, this perhaps represents an early example of the *East London Observer's* suspicion of the wartime conduct of the immigrant Jewish community rather than any slight on the patriotism of the East End in general.

⁶⁶² Jack Jones, untitled memoirs published in Margaret Cohen, Marion Fagan and Hymie Fagan (Eds.), *Childhood Memories, recorded by some Socialist men and women in their later years*, (Brunel University Library). William Cotton, *I did it my Way: the Life Story of Billy Cotton* (George G Harrop & Co LTD, London 1970)

⁶⁶³ Joe Bloomberg, *Looking Back- A Docker's Life*. (Stepney Books Publications, London 1979) p.1

⁶⁶⁴ Cotton, *I did it my Way*, p.21

⁶⁶⁵ *ELO*, 29 August 1914

Overall, English East Enders were motivated to volunteer by broadly similar factors as their Russian Jewish neighbours were in the autumn of 1914, and the impetus to enlist of both groups are largely analogous with those of West End Jews described in chapter two. Men chose to fight for a variety of reasons - for love of country to love of adventure - but perhaps a greater pull, particularly in regions such as East London boasting strong community ties, was the local factor drawing men to the colours.⁶⁶⁶ As Winter relates 'some men fought for nation and empire, for King and Country, others fought for their part of London in a way they never fought for England; and when they saluted England in song and verse, their 'England' was envisioned as a very local and particular place, bounded in many cases by the streets they knew, and the daily lives they led'.⁶⁶⁷ An important attraction of the Jewish Battalion scheme in 1914 for Russian Jews was the prospect of enlisting with their friends and neighbours to participate in a momentous collective endeavour. Indeed, the *Jewish Chronicle* emphasised this sentiment in its support for the concept of a Jewish Battalion, which it argued 'represents only the same sentiment that induces men to enlist in a "Pals' Brigade". Surely it is not too much to ask that Jews, too, should sometimes line up together as – "Pals"'.⁶⁶⁸

XV. First Experiments: the Zion Mule Corps

It will now be explored how the Jewish Battalion idea moved on from its unsuccessful beginnings in 1914 to the creation of the first all Jewish unit in the British Army, the Zion Mules Corps. This will necessarily move the focus briefly away from London to the recruiting centre of Alexandria and the fighting

⁶⁶⁶ John Blake, *Memories of Old Poplar* (Stepney Books Publications, London 1977), p.7- 'in those days before the First World War, street doors of every house were always open, and were not shut till bed-time at night. Anyone feeling lonely only had to stand at the door, and in a short time someone would come along and have a chat and cheer their neighbour up'

⁶⁶⁷ Winter, *Capital Cities at War*, p.7

⁶⁶⁸ *JC*, 27 November 1914

grounds of Gallipoli. However the formation of the Zion Mules Corps was to prove of great importance to London Jewry. It would prove that the formation of a Jewish unit in the British Army consisting of Jewish immigrants with no particular fondness for Britain's war cause could pass from rhetoric to reality. The feasibility and success of the unit would inspire more substantial attempts by Zionist leaders in London to recruit immigrant Jews into a Jewish Battalion, and would go a long way to convincing the British government later in the war that the concept of a Jewish battalion had legs. The existence of the Zion Mules Corps would however, harden the attitudes of opponents of the Jewish Battalion scheme as the possibility of its future implementation appeared less fanciful and more threatening. Most importantly perhaps, a discussion of the motivations for enlistment and the experience of active service for recruits in the Zion Mule Corps will illuminate later discussions on the recruits of the Jewish Battalions of 1917/1918.

The concept of a Jewish Battalion may have been defeated in 1914 by internal resentment of the idea from within established Jewry, but it also failed through a lack of belief in the project on the behalf of the government, and doubt amongst its supporters as to whether its ultimate aim was a British or Jewish ideal. No such deficiency in belief or confusion of aim clouded the judgement of the ardent Zionist Vladimir Jabotinsky, a Russian Jewish journalist whose energy and political machinations led directly to the endorsement of the Jewish Battalion scheme by the British Government in 1917. For Jabotinsky a Jewish fighting unit was a means to an end, specifically as a tool to forge a Jewish homeland. The Battalion idea was an extenuation of Zionist policy and a weapon the movement could arm itself with in an increasingly militarised world. Born 1880 in Odessa, Tsarist Russia, Jabotinsky developed a fierce Jewish nationalism after witnessing the Kishinev pogrom in 1903. He would later be active in establishing Jewish self-defence organisations across Russia, although he confessed to no particular cultural affinity with Judaism in his

youth.⁶⁶⁹ Elected as a delegate at the sixth Zionist Congress, Jabotinsky quickly aligned himself politically and spiritually with Theodor Herzl (although he would reject Herzl's Uganda plan for a Jewish homeland) and Max Nordau, who became a confidant and mentor.⁶⁷⁰

The period 1880-1914 witnessed a broad sociological discussion within many leading European nations regarding the fitness and continuing veracity of their most potent weapon, the male of military age. This was particularly the case in Britain, where the poor performances of British troops during the Boer War were equated with the debilitating effects of industrialisation on the health of the working classes, and cited as evidence for the decline in industrial output vis-à-vis Germany and the USA in the decade before 1914. Likewise, in the years before the First World War the physical fitness of Jews became for the likes of Nordau and Jabotinsky a mandatory prerequisite for the future success of Zionism. It had also become a fixation for non-Zionist interests. The formation of the Jewish Lads' Brigade in London in 1895 by the vice chairman of the influential Anglo-Jewish Gentleman's club The Maccabeans aimed to: 'Cultivate the sound spirit in the sound body which marked the well trained soldier... and to spread amongst Jewish working lads the habits of smartness and obedience, while augmenting their growth and general vigour'.⁶⁷¹ Members of the JLB would account for 27% of Jewish deaths in the British Army during the war (525 of 1,949).⁶⁷² The Brigade went some way to altering the negative image of the Jew as soldier in both Jewish and non-Jewish perceptions, but its popularity amongst East London Immigrants remained low in the years before the war due to the legacy of the brutal treatment of Jews under military conscription in the Tsarist Empire. Girls were only belatedly inducted into the Brigade in the late 1950s and 1960s to form The Jewish Lads' and Girls' Brigade; however a

⁶⁶⁹ See Shmuel Katz, *Lone Wolf: a Biography of Vladimir Jabotinsky* (Barricade Books, New York 1996)

⁶⁷⁰ Ronald Sanders, *The High Walls of Jerusalem: A History of the Balfour Declaration and the Birth of the British Mandate for Palestine* (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York 1984) p.145

⁶⁷¹ Colonel Goldsmith quoted in the *JC*, 22nd February 1895, cited from: Kadish, *A Good Jew and Good Englishman*, p.12; "But What about the Boys?" *JC*, April 1891.

⁶⁷² *ibid* p.2

similar youth club, The Jewish Girls' Club, preceded the JLB, forming in 1886 and providing the inspiration for the formation of a male equivalent.⁶⁷³

Nordau's concept of 'Muscular Judaism' would no doubt have appealed to Jabotinsky and underpinned his philosophy of the potential of the Jewish Battalion.⁶⁷⁴ The future recruits, 'the brave and good soldiers, efficient and healthy'⁶⁷⁵ would, Jabotinsky hoped, sweep away the stereotype of 'the cowardly and un-soldierly Jew'.⁶⁷⁶ His close associate and fellow Zionist Chaim Weizmann, who would prove influential in working with the British Government towards the Balfour Declaration of November 1917 as seen in chapter two, described him thus: 'Jabotinsky, the passionate Zionist, was utterly un-Jewish in manner, approach and deportment. He came from Odessa....but the inner life of Jewry had no trace on him.... [He had] A certain touch of the rather theatrically chivalresque, a certain queer and irrelevant knightliness, which was not at all Jewish'.⁶⁷⁷ Jabotinsky's passion and perseverance in the cause of Zionism was at odds with his decidedly indifferent attitude and understanding of cultural Judaism and would cause him difficulties in his dealings with the Jewish community of East London, whose priorities were reversed.

By the time of the outbreak of war in August 1914, Jabotinsky was a successful journalist working for the *Russian Monitor*, a Russian paper apparently oblivious to his criticism of the Tsarist authorities and active participation in Zionist circles. Upon hearing that Turkey had declared war on the Allies in November 1914, Jabotinsky's vision of a Jewish fighting force contributing to the reclamation of Palestine was born: '[before] I had been a mere observer, without any particular reasons for wishing full triumph to one side and crushing disaster to the other... Turkey's move transformed me in one short morning into a fanatical believer in war until victory; Turkey's move made this war "my war"'.⁶⁷⁸ For Jabotinsky the goal of Zionism was the establishment

⁶⁷³ "But What about the Boys?" *Jewish Chronicle* April 1891. See also Kadish, *A Good Jew and Good Englishman*, p.2

⁶⁷⁴For more on Nordau's concept of "Muscular Judaism" See Schaffer *Unmasking the 'muscle Jew'*

⁶⁷⁵ Jabotinsky, *Jewish Legion*, p.179

⁶⁷⁶ Todd Presner, 'Clear heads, solid stomachs, and hard muscles: Max Nordau and the aesthetics of Jewish regeneration' *Modernism/Modernity*, vol. 10, no.2, 2003. p.276

⁶⁷⁷ Weizmann, *Trial and Error*, p.63

⁶⁷⁸ Jabotinsky, *Jewish Legion*, p.13

of a Jewish homeland in Palestine, not in Uganda or other proposed far flung territories of acquiescing European empires.⁶⁷⁹ This, he believed, would never come to pass whilst the Ottomans controlled the Holy Land and therefore 'the only hope for the Jewish restoration of Palestine lay in the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire'.⁶⁸⁰

A witness to Turkish decline during his time working in Istanbul between 1906-1910, Jabotinsky was convinced that war with Britain guaranteed Turkey's defeat, and was clear in the role and opportunities this presented Jews: 'If ever a war should occur between England and Turkey, the right thing for the Jews would be to form a regiment of their own and participate in the conquest of Palestine'.⁶⁸¹ The trail he followed was already worn. Russian Jewish exiles living in Palestine and Turkey (amongst whom numbered David Ben-Gurion and Isaac Ben-Zvi, future Israeli Presidents who would serve in the Jewish Battalions in the British Army)⁶⁸² held talks with the Ottomans on the possibility of a Jewish unit helping the Turks defend Palestine against a British invasion. The scheme was rejected and the misjudgement of its architects quickly demonstrated by the arrest of Jews in Ottoman lands by the Turkish authorities in December 1914.⁶⁸³ In Britain, the actions of Captain Webber and his supporters such as Leopold Greenberg have already been discussed, but talks regarding the potential of a Jewish Legion as a powerful weapon for Zionism had more discreetly taken place in the autumn of 1914 amongst intellectual Russian Jews active in the Zionist movement and residing in Britain, included Chaim Weizmann. One of Weizmann's contacts, an Italian-based Russian Jew called Pinhas Rutenberg, claimed the credit for originating the idea of the future Jewish Battalions, a claim confirmed in Weizmann's memoirs.⁶⁸⁴

Jabotinsky however, if not the originator behind the concept of a Jewish Battalion fighting in the First World War, was certainly the driving force behind

⁶⁷⁹ For more on the Uganda Plan see Mark Levene, 'Herzl, the Scramble, and a meeting that never happened: revisiting the Notion of an African Zion'. In Bar-Yosef, *'The Jew' in Late-Victorian and Edwardian Culture*

⁶⁸⁰ Vladimir Jabotinsky cited in Katz, *Lone Wolf*, p.146

⁶⁸¹ Jabotinsky, *Jewish Legion*, p.14

⁶⁸² For more on Ben Gurion's later involvement in the Jewish Battalions see Shabtai Teveth, *Ben-Gurion: the Burning Ground 1886-1948* (Hale, London 1987)

⁶⁸³ Watts *Jewish Legion*, p.21

⁶⁸⁴ Weizmann, *Trial and Error*, pp.212-216

the idea's transfer from idea to reality. Arriving in Alexandria in December 1914 on the pretext of reporting on the local response to the Sultan's Jihad against the British Empire, Jabotinsky was to find, almost accidentally, a willing and politically uncontroversial source of Jewish men to serve in what would become the Zion Mule Corps. Learning from a British customs official upon arrival in Alexandria that: 'A few days ago a boatful of Zionists, almost a thousand of them, arrived from Jaffa – the Turks kicked them out of Palestine', Jabotinsky immediately dropped his journalistic mission and became a recruiter. The British formed the refugees into camps and here Jabotinsky, along with Joseph Trumpledor attempted to persuade the Jewish refugees to pledge to join the legion. Trumpledor, born also in 1880 in Pyatigorsk near Rostov-on-Don, had been conscripted into the Russian Army like his father before him. Wounded severely enough at the siege of Port Arthur in 1905 to warrant amputation of his left arm, Trumpledor impressed his senior officers by requesting a return to the front, only to end up in a Japanese prisoner of war camp after the surrender of the port. In his time in the camp Trumpledor formed a Zionist circle amongst fellow Jews who felt institutionally victimised within the Russian Army.⁶⁸⁵

His reward of military honours and promotion to officer's rank (almost unheard of for a Jewish soldier in the Tsarist Army) did not dim his commitment to Zionism. He eventually left the army for Palestine, settling in a Jewish collective farm at Degania east of the Jordan River that required constant episodes of organised defence against marauders and antisemitic bands. He displayed, quite literally, a single handed determination to disprove slurs of cowardliness against Jewish manhood. In one memorable incident remembered years later by a comrade at Degania, 'We ran after them, exchanged a few shots and drove them out. One-armed Trumpledor handled his rifle better than I did and had a surer aim'.⁶⁸⁶

Disgusted with the Ottomanisation of the Jewish population of Palestine, Trumpledor escaped to Alexandria, arriving shortly before the influx of refugees from Jaffa in early 1915.⁶⁸⁷ Trumpledor did not hesitate to join Jabotinsky's

⁶⁸⁵ Jabotinsky, *Jewish Legion*, p.21

⁶⁸⁶ Joseph Barratz, cited in *ibid.* p.151

⁶⁸⁷ *Ibid*

project. Often accompanying Jabotinsky to meetings with high ranking British military and government officials, his reputation as a courageous and decorated soldier lent the project an important air of gravitas that helped overcome prejudice for the scheme based on old notions of the poor quality of Jewish troops. This same reputation proved a burden on recruitment drives in the East End of London later in the war. Ironically given his first-hand experience of prejudice during his service in the Russian Army, Trumpledor was seen as a symbol of the hated Tsarist Military Conscription laws that many East London Jewish residents had fled from, and an inability to communicate in Yiddish compounded the impression that Trumpledor did not speak for the interests of London's immigrant Jews.

At a meeting organised by Jabotinsky and Trumpledor on 2 March 1915 with local Jewish businessmen and enthusiasts for the project, the decision was made to 'Recruit from the young men in the camps a Jewish unit to fight on the side of the British Army on the Palestinian front'.⁶⁸⁸ According to Elias Gilner there were approximately 1,200 Jewish refugees from Palestine in the British camps at Alexandria, of whom three quarters were Russian, the remainder of Palestinian or local origin.⁶⁸⁹ A week after the 2 March meeting 200 men had pledged to join the Jewish Legion.

Very little information regarding service records of the men exist outside of the Avichail testimonials, with the ad hoc nature of their recruitment meaning no official unit records, such as war diaries and intelligence logs, were kept.⁶⁹⁰ Adler in the *British Jewry book of Honour* lists the volunteers as mainly 'students and workmen'.⁶⁹¹ Some, such as Isaic Mouchkatine – a native of Vitebsk – had been forced to leave Russia 'due to revolutionary activity'⁶⁹², others due to persecution, such as Jack Knopp whose family survived the first and second pogroms in Kishinev before emigrating.⁶⁹³ The majority had escaped persecution to begin new lives in Palestine: the indiscriminate brutality by which it was wrested away from them in December 1914 by the Turkish

⁶⁸⁸ Gilner, *War and Hope*, p.36

⁶⁸⁹ Ibid, p.35

⁶⁹⁰ Watts, *Jewish Legion*, p.27

⁶⁹¹ Adler, *British Jewry book of Honour*, p.63

⁶⁹² Isaic Mouchkatine, Avichail Testimonial.

⁶⁹³ Jack Knopp, Avichail Testimonial.

authorities perhaps attests to their eagerness to volunteer. This was demonstrated by one of the youngest recruits Irving Warchawsky who was told that he was too young to be enlisted in the British Army: 'As I passed Trumpledor I wept bitterly... That evening when I came to see him, he asked me to show him my passport. He said to me, "Tear it up!" I destroyed it and asked him, "And now what?" He answered, "Get in line tomorrow at Camp Sinima, and when they ask you for your passport, tell them you lost it. And when they ask you how old you are you'll tell them that you're 19." And happily and overjoyed, I entered what was to become the well-known Zion Mule Corps'.⁶⁹⁴

A release from the boredom of the refugee camp would have been a motivating factor for many of the young recruits, but a desire to take up arms against their Ottoman oppressors seems to be the primary motivator for volunteering. In this, their hopes were to be frustrated. The British military authorities in Egypt would only agree to the use of the men as a supply corps as their experience best matched handling and equipping mules for transport.⁶⁹⁵ The British official's motives may have been sincere, but for Jabotinsky it was another slur on Jewish manhood, that Jewish men were not up to the task of performing fighting duties alongside British troops.

Initially titled the Assyrian Refugee Mule Corps and established on the 23rd of March 1915, the task of leading the Corps fell to Lt. Colonel Patterson, a forty seven year old Irish Protestant who happened to be in Alexandria at the right time. A renowned big game hunter in Africa and author of the hugely popular *Man Eaters of Tsavo* and a decorated soldier of the Boer War to boot, Patterson was the definition of the Edwardian 'Soldier Gentleman' in the mould of his contemporary Winston Churchill and of the type so greatly featured in popular adventure novels of pre-war imperial British society.⁶⁹⁶ He also held a deep personal interest in Jewish history and the Holy Land, not untypical of a product of Victorian religious education as Eitan Bar-Yosef's penetrating

⁶⁹⁴ Irving Warshawsky, Avichail Testimonial.

⁶⁹⁵ Watts, *Jewish Legion*, pp.23-24

⁶⁹⁶ John H Patterson, *The man-eaters of Tsavo and other East African Adventures* (Macmillan & Co, London 1907). See John M. MacKenzie (Ed.), *Imperialism and popular culture* (Manchester University Press, Manchester 1986)

analysis in *The Holy Land in English Culture 1799-1917* shows.⁶⁹⁷ Patterson felt bound up with the fate of Zionism and the Jewish unit he now commanded: 'When as a boy I eagerly devoured the records of the glorious deeds of the Jewish military captains such as Joshua, Joab, Gideon, Judas Maccabee, I never dreamed that I in a small way would become a captain of a host of the Children of Israel'.⁶⁹⁸

Patterson's involvement with the Zion Mule Corps and later with the Jewish Battalions of the Royal Fusiliers sits within a strong tradition of British Non-Jewish Zionism. In the 19th century, Lord Palmerston and the Anglican Minister William Shecter were keen advocates of Jewish colonisation of Palestine within the structure and ideological vision of British imperialism, whilst amongst Patterson's contemporaries prominent non-Jewish Zionists included Joseph Chamberlain and of course Arthur Balfour and Lloyd George, as was discussed in more detail in chapter two.⁶⁹⁹ Indeed, the activities of Zionists such as Jabotinsky and Trumpledor, with the assistance of non-Jewish Zionists such as Patterson, would parallel the endeavours of Weizmann, Lloyd George and Balfour. The Zion Mule Corps and later the Jewish Battalions, would represent a form of practical or 'muscular Zionism' to compliment the diplomatic successes of Zionists in Whitehall. As Jabotinsky reflected after the war 'How could the Zionist movement express itself in those war years? It was broken and paralysed, and was, by its nature, completely outside the narrow horizons of a warring world with its war governments. Only one manifestation of the Zionist will was able to break through on to this horizon, to show that Zionism was alive and prepared for sacrifice; to compel ministers, ambassadors and – most important of all – journalists, to treat the striving of the Jewish people for its country as a matter of urgent reality, as something which could not be postponed, which had to be given an immediate yes or no – and that was the

⁶⁹⁷ 'It was the Sunday school which stood at the heart of this biblical culture. With its scriptural geography classes and magic-lantern shows, the singing of hymns and the reading of bible stories, the occasional visit to the model of Jerusalem or even to the Palestine Exhibition, the Sunday school introduced the Holy Land to its young pupils. Consequently, just like the school itself, the Holy Land became imbued with a powerful sense of nostalgia, a yearning towards tradition, communal identity, and family: Jerusalem, my happy home', Bar-Yosef, *The Holy Land in English Culture*, p.180

⁶⁹⁸ John H. Patterson, *With the Zionists in Gallipoli* (Hutchinson, London 1916), p.46

⁶⁹⁹ See Regina Sharif, *Non-Jewish Zionism: Its Roots in Western History* (Zed Press, London 1983), p.70

[Jewish] Legion Movement.⁷⁰⁰ To return to the new commander of the Zion Mule Corps, a characteristic that Patterson shared with Balfour and other non-Jewish Zionists was, despite a deep admiration for the Jewish race, an inability to comprehend Jewish assimilation and a tendency to place 'all emphasis on the distinctiveness of the Jews' and 'almost to imply that emancipation had done them a wrong by blurring their identity as a nation'.⁷⁰¹ This attitude would later cause Patterson significant problems in his dealings with the Anglo-Jewish community in 1917 during his attempts to broker consensus on the issue of the Jewish Battalion.

Following the confirmation of the unit as a support corps, Jabotinsky abandoned the Alexandrian project to seek backers in Europe in order to realise his vision of a proud successor to the ancient Jewish military heritage of the Maccabees. The potential of the Zion Mule Corps to prove the nucleus for something greater was, however, clear to Patterson and Trumpledor. The corps consisted of 375 officers and men; the official size was given as 500, and the official roll in the British Jewry book of Honour puts it at 727 members.⁷⁰² This figure has been challenged by Harold Pollins whose analysis of Adler's figures reveals numerous cases of duplication and corruption and Patterson's figure of 500 is perhaps the safer one.⁷⁰³ They were differentiated from the Jewish youth of Whitechapel and Bow in two important respects. Firstly, unlike immigrant Jews in London they were directly affected by the war, and the cause of the reclamation of a Jewish homeland in Palestine inspired them personally as it was, in fact, their adopted home and the Turks their direct enemy who had expelled them. Secondly, they could be enlisted into a Jewish unit far less controversially and less visibly in Alexandria on the periphery of British society than could Russian Jews in London.

⁷⁰⁰ Jabotinsky, *Jewish Legion*, p.58

⁷⁰¹ Op. cited Leonard Stein, *The Balfour Declaration* (Valentine & Mitchell, London 1961) p.163. For a more comprehensive and up to date study on Philosemitism see Jonathan Karp and Adam Sutcliffe (Eds.) *Philosemitism and History* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2011)

⁷⁰² Watts, *Jewish Legion*, p.28

⁷⁰³ Harold Pollins, 'Jews in the British Army in the First World War', *Jewish Journal of Sociology*, 37 (1995)

The force was not to be sent directly to fight in Palestine but instead to take part in the amphibious assault against the Turkish and German defenders at Gallipoli. Despite this set-back, the policy of 'Any front leads to Zion'⁷⁰⁴ was adopted by the leaders of the retitled Zion Mule Corps. The corps received a number of medals and mentions in despatches and was praised for its courage under the heaviest fire on the *Helles* sector.⁷⁰⁵ The Corps was evacuated from Gallipoli at the end of 1915 as part of the larger strategic withdrawal of the British forces on the Gallipoli peninsula and shipped back to Alexandria. With little prospect of a new campaign in Palestine or elsewhere, the Corps was disbanded on the 26th May 1916.⁷⁰⁶

The importance of the Zion Mule Corps to the future prospects of recruiting a regiment of British Jews was subtle but significant. Only the *Jewish Chronicle* and no other Jewish or national newspaper reported on the establishment of the regiment in April 1915.⁷⁰⁷ However, the raw facts of a British Army unit formed from an exiled and nationless group of refugee Jews would provide powerful evidence of the possibilities of success for Jabotinsky, and the bravery of the corps under fire a clear collective disavowal of the old slur of Jewish cowardliness.

XVI. Building Support: 1915-1917

In the years 1915-1917 London's Jewish population increasingly experienced the full effects of war strain. The War Office announced in December 1915 that British-born Jews of friendly alien parentage were now eligible for service, accounting for the majority of East End Jews of military age.⁷⁰⁸ However there

⁷⁰⁴ 'To get the Turk out of Palestine we've got to smash the Turk. Which side you begin the smashing, north or south, is just technique. Any front leads to Zion' Trumpledor to Jabotinsky in May 1915 cited in Jabotinsky, *Jewish Legion*, p.42

⁷⁰⁵ Watts, *Jewish Legion*, p.44

⁷⁰⁶ Ibid p.46

⁷⁰⁷ *JC*, 30 April 1915

⁷⁰⁸ War office communique 18th December 1915. Cited in Watts, *Jewish Legion*, p.56

was increased exasperation from Whitehall with the vacillation of the Board of Deputies and the Jewish elders on the issue of Russian Jewish recruitment.⁷⁰⁹ The indecisive meetings on the subject of recruitment drives and stonewalling on the issue of a Jewish Battalion led to the repetition of pre-war accusations from concerned interests in British society that established Jewry wasn't doing enough to take control of and responsibility for the immigrant population, and that this weakness was now having a negative impact on Britain's war effort.⁷¹⁰ The *Jewish Chronicle* anxiously reported on isolated but increasingly frequent cases of violence towards Jews or vandalism of Jewish shops, with editorials linking the violence to grievances caused by poor Russian Jewish enlistment.⁷¹¹ The relative prosperity of the Jewish trades in supplying boots and uniforms for the army increased animosity directed towards them from non-Jewish residents of the East End, as discussed previously in chapter one.⁷¹²

The 1914 taunt 'what are the Jews Doing?'⁷¹³ increasingly morphed into a more sinister antisemitic discourse that blended with mistaken accusations of Germanic sympathies and anti-Entente bias on the part of the Jewish population.⁷¹⁴ As already discussed in chapter one, occasionally this animosity towards Jews flared up into large-scale violence, seen in the anti-Jewish riots in the aftermath of the sinking of the *Lusitania* in May 1915 and again later in a period of particular shortage on the Home Front in Bethnal Green in September 1917.⁷¹⁵ Eugene C. Black has argued in his work *The Social Politics of Anglo-Jewry* that it was one thing to expect British Jews to volunteer, another thing to expect alien Jews to volunteer before conscription had even been introduced for British citizens.⁷¹⁶ However the rising death tolls on the western front, resulting from the Neuve Chapelle offensive in 1915, had left the British Army close to its limits of available manpower that it could sustain from a voluntary

⁷⁰⁹ Board of Deputies minutes of Meetings 1916. See also Aubrey Newman, *Board of Deputies of British Jews*, pp.81-88

⁷¹⁰ Cesarani, *Embattled Minority*, pp.55-70

⁷¹¹ *JC*, 14 June 1915; 18 August 1915

⁷¹² Bush, *East London Labour*, p.165

⁷¹³ *JC*, 9 September 1914

⁷¹⁴ See Panikos Panayi, 'Anti-German Riots in Britain during the First World War', in Panikos Panayi (Ed.), *Racial Violence in Britain in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Leicester University Press, London 1996) and Cesarani, *Embattled Minority*, p.65

⁷¹⁵ Bush, *Behind the Lines*, pp.250-262

⁷¹⁶ Black, *Social Politics of Anglo-Jewry*, p.374

recruitment system.⁷¹⁷ The introduction of conscription in 1916 would lead to a growing clamour for a solution to be found for what to do with the 30,000 Russian Jewish males of fighting age residing in Britain who were exempt from the law on naturalisation grounds.⁷¹⁸

After leaving Trumpledor and the Zion Mule Corps in April 1915, Jabotinsky, following unsuccessful flirtations with the Italian and French governments on the issue of a Jewish Battalion and support for Zionism,⁷¹⁹ settled in London to continue his campaign.⁷²⁰ London in the summer of 1915 did not however represent promising conditions for Jabotinsky and his aspirations for a Jewish fighting force. The British Government was indifferent to the concept of 'fancy' units and was conscious to avoid any ties to Zionist causes. The prospect of a Jewish Legion formed from Russian Jews faced the opposition of the majority of the Jewish establishment, as well as the indifference and occasional hostility of the men proposed to fill its ranks.⁷²¹ It was clear to Anglo-Jewish leaders, however, that something had to be done concerning the Russian Jewish community's failure to meet enlistment expectations, and there was increasing concern that the issue would have a detrimental effect on Anglo-Jewry as a whole.

Established Jewry's communal policy in 1915, as directed by the Board of Deputies, was characterised by an accelerated campaign for the assimilation of the Jewish immigrant population under the strained atmosphere of the war that was driven by a renewed insecurity that Jewish emancipation may yet be 'on

⁷¹⁷ Stephen Constantine, and Maurice Kirby and Mary Rose, (Eds), *The First World War in British History* (Edward Arnold, London 1995), pp.90-112

⁷¹⁸ See RJQ Adams, 'Asquith's Choice: The May Coalition and the Coming of Conscription', *Journal of British Studies*, Vol 25. No 3. (July 1986) pp.243-263. Lord Derby raised the possibility of a Jewish Regiment in an interview with the *JC*, in April 1915 but little came of it at this time.

⁷¹⁹ Watts, *Jewish Legion*, p.49. the one positive to come out of the trip was the committed support given to the Jewish Legion plan from Chaim Weizmann, whom Jabotinsky met in Paris, and would prove an invaluable go-between with the War Office.

⁷²⁰ He was to make a final trip to Russia to renew his lucrative contract with the newspaper *The Russian Monitor* and a brief visit to the Zionist Bureau in Copenhagen where senior Zionists attempted unsuccessfully to convince him to abandon the Legion idea- cited in Jabotinsky, *Jewish Legion*, pp.50-56

⁷²¹ Watts, *Jewish Legion*, pp.47-52

trial'.⁷²² As we saw in chapter two, the immigrant community was identified as 'the potential weak link in the solid front of Anglo-Jewish patriotism'.⁷²³ Encouragement and cajoling of the immigrant community to enlist and display an interest in the war increased, with a sustained propaganda campaign conducted by the Jewish Recruitment Committee taking the call for enlistment to the streets of Stepney, Whitechapel and Bow.⁷²⁴ Simultaneously, longstanding philanthropic aid extended to their East End co-religionists was threatened to be withdrawn unless enlistment picked up.

This was demonstrated in a highly visible and controversial manner when the BoD voted to enforce the policy in their East End soup kitchens that no male of fighting age would be provided soup unless they were in military uniform, the 'No Khaki No Soup' campaign.⁷²⁵ The initiative drew stinging criticism towards the BoD from concerned interests within established Jewry, as well as from socialist and Radical groups in the East End – most notably the FJPC. It also raised wider concerns that the BoD and other sections of the Jewish establishment were failing in their duty towards the immigrant community in their haste to appease Gentile anger over Russian Jewish enlistment.⁷²⁶ As was discussed in chapter two, the BoD and leading Jewish figures such as Lord Rothschild and Leo Wolf remained quiet in the face of Government internment of Jewish enemy aliens in the first months of the war, and continued to placidly oppose a Jewish Battalion as a tool of segregation and separation in their roles as intelligence gatherers for the Government on Jewish affairs.

The static nature of the frontline in France and Belgium in the summer of 1915 fuelled a key debate within the War Cabinet and military planners – the so called *Easterners vs. Westerners* debate – which held direct implications for the prospect of a Jewish Legion serving in Palestine. The 'Westerners' led by War Minister Lord Kitchener believed the quickest road to victory was to defeat the main protagonist, Germany, head on with a series of major offensives in the West. 'Easterners' such as Munitions Minister Lloyd George and the Lord of the

⁷²² Kadish, *Bolsheviks and British Jews*, p.57

⁷²³ Bush, *East London Labour*, p.166

⁷²⁴ Watts, *Jewish Legion*, pp.70-72

⁷²⁵ Alderman, *British Jewry*, p.239

⁷²⁶ Alderman, *Modern British Jewry*, p.241

Admiralty Winston Churchill attacked the huge casualty rates sustained in the campaigns in Flanders and north-west France. They argued for a periphery strategy to weaken the Central Powers by knocking out Turkey in the eastern Mediterranean and threatening Austro-Hungary's position by advancing into the Balkans.⁷²⁷

The subsequent failure of the Gallipoli front in 1915 led to the commitment in December that year – in joint allied staff talks with the French and Russians – to retain troops and equipment primarily for operations in the west. The validity of this approach was seemingly confirmed by the necessity to relieve the chronic pressure on the French at Verdun in the spring of 1916 with a summer offensive in the Somme valley.⁷²⁸ This, coupled with Kitchener's apathy for 'fancy units', meant the chances of Jabotinsky gaining official support for the creation of a Jewish Battalion to take part in a British offensive in Palestine in 1915/1916 appeared remote.⁷²⁹

However, the esteem the public held for Lord Kitchener as the figurehead of the war effort was increasingly out of kilter with his diminishing influence within the War Cabinet.⁷³⁰ By 1915 his star was darkened by the 'Shell Crisis' and the part-responsibility he played in the strategic failures at Neuve-Chappelle and Gallipoli. Kitchener saw his position as War Minister further eroded by the press agitation against him led by Lord Northcliffe at *The Times* and the grumblings within the Cabinet where his grasp of strategic military planning was being openly questioned.⁷³¹ The diminishing influence of Kitchener was a conversation topic in the first meeting between Jabotinsky and Colonel Patterson in December 1915 when the latter arrived in London on convalescent leave from leading the Zion Mule Corps in Gallipoli:

'Patterson: "How are the chances for the Jewish Regiment looking?"

⁷²⁷ Elizabeth Greenhalgh, *Victory through Coalition: Britain and France during the First World War* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2005), pp.201-221

⁷²⁸ Ibid. pp.270-275

⁷²⁹ Jabotinsky, *Jewish Legion*, pp.58-59

⁷³⁰ Lloyd George famously described him thus: 'he had flashes of greatness. He was like one of those revolving lighthouses which radiate momentary gleams of revealing light far out into the surrounding gloom and then suddenly relapse into complete darkness'. Cited in David Lloyd George, *War Memoirs* (Nicholson and Watson, London 1933) p.194

⁷³¹ Greenhalgh, *Victory Coalition*, pp.278-280

Jabotinsky: "Not good. Kitchener does not like us."

Patterson: "No matter, Kitchener is but one man and can no longer sway the Cabinet."⁷³²

The eclipse of Kitchener (he was to disappear in mysterious circumstances at sea whilst en route to Russia in June 1916) removed one obstacle, but the Government and in particular the War Office remained sceptical of Jabotinsky's proposed Jewish Regiment and its connections with Zionism. This is revealed in a WO minute from 17 January 1916 entitled 'Military objections and administrative difficulties of the scheme [Jewish Regiment]' which was in response to Jabotinsky's request for a formal meeting to discuss the project (he received no official reply): 'Is it not likely that this corps may in some way be brought in connection with the Zionist movement? As a matter of fact Mr Jabotinsky was told some ten months ago that we could not entertain a scheme of his to raise a corps of Jews for service in Palestine. On the whole therefore we are not in favour of this project'.⁷³³

As with the rebuff of his attempts in Alexandria ten months previously to gain official British support for his plans, Jabotinsky was not especially perturbed by this latest setback, and through Patterson and Chaim Weizmann he began to build a network of sympathisers within and around Whitehall. Through Patterson, Jabotinsky was introduced to Leo Amery, a Unionist MP with whom Patterson had an acquaintance with from the Boer war. Amery – an outspoken proponent of the Eastern strategy, having recently returned from an appointment as a liaison officer with the WO in Gallipoli and the Balkans⁷³⁴ – was pro-Zionist and eager to promote British interests in the Middle East.⁷³⁵ Research by William Rubinstein has revealed Amery's mother was Jewish (her family before leaving their native Hungary converted to Protestantism), a fact Amery made great efforts to keep hidden, but which might explain his attachment to Zionism during the war.⁷³⁶ Amery helped set up meetings

⁷³² Jabotinsky, *Jewish Legion*, p.98

⁷³³ PRO, FO 371 2835/18995

⁷³⁴ Watts, *Jewish Legion*, p.55

⁷³⁵ *ibid* p.58

⁷³⁶ William Rubinstein, 'The Secret of Leopold Amery', *History Today*, 49, 2, February 1999, pp.17-26

between Jabotinsky and Patterson with Lord Robert Cecil at the Foreign Office who stated that unlike the WO they had 'no objection on political grounds to the raising of a Jewish Corps in England' and 'We are not at all irrevocably opposed to Zionism'.⁷³⁷ Whilst the WO objected to the scheme on the grounds that they did not want to become committed to or entangled in Zionist activities, the FO saw in the scheme the potential propaganda benefits of securing world Jewish support. This was partly in regards to the U.S.A and its substantial Jewish minority but also in pre-empting any similar attempt by Germany, whose Jewish population at some 615,000 was substantially bigger than the Jewish community of Britain, which numbered approximately 240,000.⁷³⁸ Cecil put Jabotinsky in contact with the minister for propaganda at the FO, Lord Newton, to whom Jabotinsky stated his belief that 'Jews loved Palestine more than they hated Russia', and that a British commitment to Zionism through raising a Jewish Legion and capturing Palestine, would win over not only Russian Jews in England who despised the Tsar but also Jews in America who the FO was concerned could prove susceptible to German propaganda.⁷³⁹ Newton cautiously gave his support and continued to further the venture within the department.⁷⁴⁰

The government as a whole, and in particular the Home Secretary Herbert Samuel, were increasingly concerned by the growing public resentment against the Russian Jews that had accelerated following the introduction of conscription for all unmarried British males aged between 18 and 41 years old in January 1916. In the spring and summer of 1916 Samuel laid the groundwork for a military convention with Russia which would present friendly aliens in Britain (mainly Russian Jews) the choice between conscription into the British Army or deportation home for enlistment in their own army.⁷⁴¹ As a British Jew but with certain sympathies with Zionism, Samuel was, in the words of David Cesarani, 'in an exquisitely agonising position'.⁷⁴² Having acted as he saw it as an Englishman and public servant in a manner serving Britain's national self-

⁷³⁷ PRO, FO 371 2816

⁷³⁸ Watts, *Jewish Legion*, p.59. For more on the fortunes of the Jewish community of Germany see Fine, *Jewish Integration in the German Army*

⁷³⁹ Watts, *Jewish Legion*, p.60

⁷⁴⁰ PRO, FO 371 2816

⁷⁴¹ Englander, *History of Jewish Immigrants*, pp.327-329

⁷⁴² Cesarani, *Embattled Minority*, pp.67-69

interest, he was openly attacked for betraying his Jewish roots and acting illiberally by threatening the immigrants with deportation back to the country they had fled from persecution.⁷⁴³ The need to consult with the Russian Government and to test the legislative viability of the proposal delayed the implementation of the Anglo-Russian military Convention until July 1917.⁷⁴⁴ The ominous threat of future deportation back to Russia was expected to boost the voluntary enlistment of Russian Jews into the British forces in the meantime.

However, the proposed Convention met open hostility from both the immigrant community – with the formation of the FJPC – as well as criticism from within established Jewry such as the *Jewish Chronicle* which complained that the Convention ‘would be an exchange of freedom for oppression’ and arguing in its stead that ‘the formation of a Jewish Battalion on the lines of the Zion Mule Corps would adequately meet the case of the Russian Jews’.⁷⁴⁵ Herbert Samuel still held out hope that compulsion or deportation of Russian Jews in line with the Convention would not be needed and that the threat of it would help kick-start voluntary solutions.⁷⁴⁶

The resentment of Russian Jews in the East End towards the prospect of deportation back to Russia was further demonstrated in late July 1916 with angry demonstrations in Whitechapel. *The Times* reported ‘A mass meeting of the English Zionist Federation, held in the Pavilion Theatre, Whitechapel, yesterday, had to be abandoned owing to the violent demonstration against the president of the federation, Mr Joseph Cowen, who is in favour of the proposal that those Russian Jews of military age who would not join the British Army should be sent to Russia, and not to neutral countries. As soon as Mr Cowen rose to speak nearly all the audience began to shout him down, shaking their fists and abusing him in Yiddish. There were fist fights in the gallery and in the body of the hall, and one man who was opposed to the chairman mounted the platform, but was ejected. The police were called in and comparative order was restored, but as soon as Mr. Cowen again attempted to begin his speech the

⁷⁴³ Ibid

⁷⁴⁴ Watts, *Jewish Legion*, p.64

⁷⁴⁵ *JC*, 14 April 1916

⁷⁴⁶ Watts, *Jewish Legion*, p.64

uproar was renewed, and some of the audience sang the Jewish Anthem'.⁷⁴⁷ *The Times* went on to state 'Many of those who took part in the demonstration, it is believed, profess to be quite prepared to join the British Army provided they are given their naturalisation papers, but they object to being sent back to Russia'.⁷⁴⁸

Certain observations can be drawn from this incident. Firstly, the unpopularity of the proposed Convention with Russia had succeeded in mobilising Russian Jews into active and organised protest - possibly co-ordinated by the FJPC - that also underlined the intractability of many Russian Jews over the prospect of a return to Tsarist Russia. Secondly, if *The Times'* final assertion can be taken at face value, Russian Jews were not actively opposed to serving in the British Army in principle at least, and the desirability of obtaining British naturalisation as part of their service hints at a greater identification with Britain and the nation's war cause than was the contemporary perception. And thirdly, the holding of a prominent public Zionist meeting in the heart of the East End shows that the English Zionist Federation was confident of recruiting support from within immigrant Jewry. However, the overshadowing of the Zionist cause at the meeting by the issue of Russian Jewish deportation reveals that, in the summer of 1916, East End Jews were quite understandably more concerned at British government legislation that impacted on them personally rather than helping secure distant British support for an eventual Jewish homeland.

This event encouraged Jabotinsky to launch a concerted recruitment drive in the East End in the autumn of 1916. Samuel, in a series of letters to Jabotinsky, offered any help he could provide but this fell short of the official Government support for the scheme he craved, dejectedly replying 'without an official statement from you I cannot guarantee success'.⁷⁴⁹

Jabotinsky set out the slogan for his campaign to a Liberal MP, Joseph King, at a meeting at the National Liberal Club in early 1916 following King's assertion that Russian Jews should join the British Army in large numbers as British Jews and Gentiles had done: 'It is an unjust demand... because there is

⁷⁴⁷ *The Times*, 24 July 1916

⁷⁴⁸ *ibid*

⁷⁴⁹ Jabotinsky, *Jewish Legion*, p.76

a vast difference between your boys and those East End boys. Your boys are British; if Britain wins their people are saved. Ours are Jews; if Britain wins, millions of their brothers will still remain in purgatory... in order to be just you can demand only two things from the foreign Jew: First “Home defence”, to protect Britain itself, because he lives here; second to fight for the liberation of Palestine, for that is the heim of his people. “Home and Heim” – that is my war motto’.⁷⁵⁰

Unfortunately for Jabotinsky, the ‘Home and Heim’ campaign proved to be a dismal failure. In a series of public meetings and rallies during October 1916 the recruitment drive for a Jewish Regiment received only three hundred firm pledges to join.⁷⁵¹ There were prior movements within the community to prevent enlistment, with the *Jewish Chronicle* reporting in August the arrest of three men circulating the Yiddish language newspaper *The Worker’s Friend* which urged Jews not to enlist.⁷⁵² Jabotinsky himself suspected that assimilationist and anti-Legion elements within established Jewry such as the arch anti-Zionist Claude Montefiore – the president of the Anglo-Jewish Association – were using their network of informers and agitators to disrupt meetings and misinform the Russian Jewish community about the feasibility of the Jewish Legion.⁷⁵³ This again reveals the complexity of the Jewish Battalion’s impact on Jewish politics in London during the war. *The Worker’s Friend* and Claude Montefiore agreed on little beyond a mutual desire to render the Jewish Battalion scheme unworkable, so both sought to stir up anti-military sentiment within the Jewish East End against the project.

Jabotinsky bitterly blamed the failure of the campaign on the lack of official backing from the Government to persuade sceptics in the community who did not believe in the feasibility of a Jewish Regiment serving in the British Army for the liberation of Palestine.⁷⁵⁴ Despite some truth in these assertions, a damning reason for the ‘Home and Heim’ campaign’s failure was that it was deeply unpopular with Russian Jews. Special Branch agent Sergeant Albers was sent

⁷⁵⁰ Ibid, p.65

⁷⁵¹ Ibid, p.77

⁷⁵² JC, 4 August 1916

⁷⁵³ Jabotinsky, *Jewish Legion*, p.77; On Montefiore see Watts, *Jewish Legion*, p.62

⁷⁵⁴ Ibid.

to monitor the meetings held on 16 and 17 of October, and reported 'The audience at both these places consisted of the Jewish element, chiefly Russians of military age. From the commencement of the proceedings in each case, they were antagonistic towards the speakers and a considerable amount of booing and hissing greeted them... At both the meetings it was found necessary to have the hall cleared by police. In my opinion it appears useless to hold these gatherings as the Jewish folk seem to greatly resent the arguments put forward, and in view of the hostile attitude of the crowd, no good purpose could be served by continuing to advocate Mr. Jabotinsky's propaganda'.⁷⁵⁵

A sizeable number of Russian Jews had been enthusiastic to enlist in the excitement of the first weeks of the war in 1914, but rejection by the Army of those who attempted to sign up on naturalisation and fitness grounds led to resentment and disinterest towards the idea of serving, coupled with the increasingly visible grim reality of a soldier's lot on the Western Front.⁷⁵⁶ The lack of a push factor of friends' enlistment, sense of patriotic duty, conscription and family pressure to join all prevented enlistment but the relative success of the Jewish trades in wartime represented the major incentive not to volunteer.⁷⁵⁷ The Board of Guardians reported in December 1915: 'The Working Classes have had a more prosperous time than for many years past'.⁷⁵⁸ As Eugene Black has stated, Russian Jews 'regarded recruitment as a thinly disguised scheme to take away their hard-won East End homes, jobs and sanctuary'.⁷⁵⁹

After one particularly hostile public meeting in Whitechapel that October, Jabotinsky was told by a Jewish anarchist: 'How much longer do you intend to knock your head against the wall? You do not understand a thing about our boys. You explain to them they should do this thing "as Jews" that thing "as

⁷⁵⁵ PRO HO 45/10819/318095/112a Special Branch Report, 18th October 1916

⁷⁵⁶ Rodker, *Memoirs of Other Fronts*, p.112

⁷⁵⁷ Anne Kershen has explored mothers influence over Jewish male youths in resisting enlistment, and Isaac Rosenberg did not initially sign up for fear of upsetting his mother. See Anne J. Kershen, 'The Construction of Home in a Spitalfields Landscape', *Landscape Research*, 29:3, (2004), pp.261-275

⁷⁵⁸ Board of Guardians minutes 1915 cited from Bush, *Behind the Lines*, p.170

⁷⁵⁹ Black, *Social Politics of Anglo-Jewry*, p.374

Englishmen” and that other “as men”. Nonsense. We are not Jews. We are not Englishmen. We are not men. What are we? We are tailors.’⁷⁶⁰ This would tend to cast doubt on the assertion that the peculiar conditions of war had bred an increased interest and participation in Zionist circles within the bulk of the immigrant Jewish communities of Britain during the First World War. Geoffrey Alderman argued in a piece for the Anglo-Jewish History conference in 1980 that: ‘During the First World War Zionism became more popular, in the East End and elsewhere in the major areas of Jewish settlement, perhaps as a reaction to the excessive, almost hysterical patriotism of the Anglo-Jewish grandees, whose attempts to enforce conscription upon immigrant Jews from Russia and Poland were bitterly resented’.⁷⁶¹

Whilst there was increasing Zionist sympathy in radical and intellectual Jewish circles,⁷⁶² Zionism had not penetrated sufficiently amongst the majority of male Jewish youths to encourage them to give up their hard won jobs. That East End Jewish youth rejected a national identity for a professional one is in line with the evolution process of a displaced ethnic minority and the importance of securing financial sustainability over integration. Jabotinsky would be forced from his experiences in the East End in the autumn of 1916 to admit the majority of the recruits to the Jewish Battalion would be compelled to join rather than volunteer for it.⁷⁶³

Between the end of 1916 and the first months of 1917 several fortuitous events were to transform the moribund fortunes of the Jewish Legion scheme and set it on the path towards realisation. The first occurred in December 1916 with the forced resignation of Asquith as prime minister and his replacement with known Zionist sympathiser Lloyd George, as well as the new role of Leo Amery as an advisor in the so called ‘kitchen Cabinet’ that counselled the prime minister on the conduct of the war.⁷⁶⁴ Lloyd George was an acquaintance of

⁷⁶⁰ Jabotinsky, *Jewish Legion*, p.61

⁷⁶¹ Geoffrey Alderman, ‘The political impact of Zionism in the East End before 1940: some thoughts prompted by the experience of Whitechapel’, in Aubrey Newman (Ed.), *The Jewish East End 1840-1939* (Jewish Historical Society Of England, London 1981), p.227

⁷⁶² William Fishman, *East End Jewish Radicals 1875-1914* (Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd, London 1975)

⁷⁶³ Watts, *Jewish Legion*, p.82

⁷⁶⁴ Ibid, p.83

Chaim Weizmann and a key 'Easterner', with one of his first acts as Prime Minister being to encourage the Commander-in-Chief of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force, General Murray, to launch a major offensive against the Turks through Sinai.⁷⁶⁵

As we saw in chapter two, Lloyd George linked his own sympathy for Zionism and interest in the Holy Land to his Victorian schooling: 'We had been trained even more in Hebrew history than in the history of our own country'.⁷⁶⁶ This was encouragement to Jabotinsky, who along with Trumpler sent a formal petition to the new Premier proposing the formation of a Jewish Legion for service in Palestine, delivered personally by Leo Amery.⁷⁶⁷ His cause was further enhanced by the toppling of the Tsarist regime in the Russian Revolution of February/March 1917. Not only did it swing neutral Jewish sentiment firmly behind the Entente and opened up the door to potential American and Canadian recruits but it was hoped that the removal of anti-tsarist sentiment would encourage Russian Jews to now enlist with the British Army. Sharman Kadish has shown that a sizeable proportion of Russian Jews who decided to return to Russia following the revolution and the ratification of the Military Convention were associated with the intellectual Left or other radical groups within the Jewish East End that had provided tenacious opposition to recruitment programmes and the Jewish Legion scheme in particular.⁷⁶⁸

Voluntary recruitment in the East End continued to be poor however, despite the renewed efforts of Jabotinsky who now had the full support of the Recruitment Department. The FJPC although weakened by the loss of the Conventionists, vigorously maintained its opposition to the scheme. More seriously for Jabotinsky was the opposition of Labour Zionist organisations within the East End, particularly the London branch of Poale Zion (Workers of Zion), who condemned the 'collective enlistment of Jews on one side in the 'Imperialist' war in which Jews, as Jews, had no real interest'.⁷⁶⁹ Jabotinsky's version of Zionism was at odds with anti-Zionist ideologies circulating in the

⁷⁶⁵ Ibid

⁷⁶⁶ Lloyd George address to the Jewish Historical Society of England 19125 cited in Bar-Yosef, *The Holy Land in English Culture*, p.182

⁷⁶⁷ Jabotinsky, *Jewish Legion*, p.79

⁷⁶⁸ Kadish, *Bolsheviks and British Jews*, pp.210-211

⁷⁶⁹ Ibid, p.225

East End of London in 1917, and was not sufficiently influential to persuade Russian Jews to freely sacrifice their hard won livelihoods.

Following a series of Pogroms against the Jewish populations in Jaffa and Tel Aviv by the Turkish authorities in May 1917, Lloyd George, sensing the propaganda value and impact of defending the Jewish Holy Land would have on world opinion,⁷⁷⁰ gave his consent to the recruitment of a Jewish Legion by briefing the WO to reconsider their objections to the scheme.⁷⁷¹ Jabotinsky now had the official backing he needed to legitimise the Jewish Legion project, and the terms of the Military Convention were also changed to offer Russian Jews the chance to join the battalion over serving in the main British Army or deportation back to Russia.

XVII. Backlash: the Battalion as a Divisive Factor in Jewish Politics

On 27 July 1917 the WO issued a press-release announcing: 'Arrangements are now nearing completion for the formation of a Jewish Regiment of Infantry. Experienced British Officers are being selected to fill the higher appointments in the unit, and instructions have already been issued with a view to the transfer to this unit of Jewish soldiers, with knowledge of Yiddish or Russian languages, who are now serving in British Regiments. It is proposed that the badges of the Regiment shall consist of a representation of King David's Shield'.⁷⁷² This declaration fell like a bombshell upon the anti-battalion camp, who felt particularly aggrieved that no prior consultation between the WO and the leadership of the established Jewish community had taken place concerning the matter.⁷⁷³ On this point, the WO had decided to circumvent the official

⁷⁷⁰ This was designed to coincide with a major offensive into Palestine planned for autumn 1917 by the British Army in Egypt.

⁷⁷¹ Watts, *Jewish Legion*, p.93

⁷⁷² JC 3 August 1917. The over-due official declaration for the formation of the Jewish Legion did not appear until 23 August, in The London Gazette, confirming Patterson's appointment as the Regiment's Commander. See Gilner, *War and Hope*, p. 108

⁷⁷³ Cesarani, *Embattled Minority*, p.71

organs of Anglo-Jewry due partly to the recent discrediting of the BoD. As was seen in chapter two, Its President, David Alexander, and Claude Montefiore wrote an open letter to *The Times* on 24 May entitled 'Palestine and Zionism-Views of Anglo-Jewry' which attempted to portray a general anti-Zionism on behalf of the community, but instead provoked a widespread backlash from many disparate Jewish voices and led to the serious questioning of the board's claim to represent the interests of the Jewish community.⁷⁷⁴ Despite this incident, the creation of the Legion re-doubled previous concerns held by prominent British Jews that the poor quality and performance of the Russian conscripts would discredit the whole of British Jewry, and touched on old fears that any form of segregation would discredit the position and rights of the community painstakingly built up since 1858. Edwin Montefiore, a cousin of Herbert Samuel, made this clear in a letter to the FO: 'Could anything be more disastrous than for Jewish Englishmen...to be bracketed with the Jewish Russians, sharing the same verdict for their part in the war?!'⁷⁷⁵

Surprisingly, amongst the most vocal opponents of the scheme was Leo Greenberg, the editor of the *Jewish Chronicle* and one of the earliest supporters of the concept of a Jewish unit. Greenberg attacked the title 'The Jewish Regiment' and the use of the Star of David for its insignia as particularly insensitive to the identity of Anglo-Jewry, stating 'When a Jewish soldier dons the British or the French, or a Russian uniform, he does so as a British, French, or a Russian soldier, and not a Jewish soldier. There is therefore, neither point nor relevancy – there will, we fear, be grounds for actual offence – in imposing the symbol of Jews or Judaism upon his accoutrements'.⁷⁷⁶ Greenberg attempted to convey to the Government the divisions within the community already caused by the Legion. Cesarani summarised his views thus: 'all sections of the Jewish population were split on this issue, with nationalists, anti-Zionists, orthodox and Liberal, immigrant and British Jews ranged on all sides'.⁷⁷⁷ Greenberg's initial support for the concept of a Jewish Regiment had been based on its use as a tool to protect Jewish recruits from the antisemitism

⁷⁷⁴ Watts, *Jewish Legion*, pp.100-101

⁷⁷⁵ Edwin Montagu to Sir Eric Drummond 3 August 1916 PRO, FO 800/99. Also reproduced in entirety in Watts, *Jewish Legion*, ppp.71-72

⁷⁷⁶ *JC*, 3 August 1917, p.3

⁷⁷⁷ *JC*, 31 August 1917; cited in Cesarani, *Embattled Minority*, p.71

perceived to be rife within the British Army, but by 1917 these concerns had been superseded by the greater fear of differentiation.

Greenberg's volte-face reveals the fluidity of Jewish politics, seen also in the pragmatic support for the Jewish Legion by Lord Rothschild (the symbolic and spiritual leader of Anglo-Jewry and not to be confused with the zealously anti-Jewish Legion Major Rothschild) whose scepticism for Zionism and distrust in the Jewish Regiment scheme was overcome by the practical benefits it provided to the solution of the Russian Jewish enlistment crisis.⁷⁷⁸ Lord Rothschild's remaining discomfort with the project is revealed in a letter to M J Landa on 23 June 1918 criticising the proposed name of 'Jewish Regiment' for the unit: 'As regards the name of the regiment I cannot say I approve at all of "the Jewish Regiment" and I never have as the regiment is not representative of all the Jews of the world not even of the British Empire. Moreover it will only arouse active opposition to the force which is to be avoided. The Judeans or Judean Regiment is the proper title.'⁷⁷⁹

Certainly the furore over the name of the regiment and its insignia was far from a triviality. At the heart of the deputations throughout August 1917 led by Montefiore, Major Rothschild and others to induce the Home Secretary Lord Derby to drop the Jewish title, was a deep-seated fear that the sum of the regiment's contribution to the war would upon the cessation of hostilities be regarded as representative of the contribution of the Jewish community as a whole. The WO's attempts at a compromise, that the regiment would be renamed in military tradition as the 38th Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers, pleased neither camp. Greenberg was correct that the Legion was far from universally popular amongst the various groups and factions that made up the Jewish community, and it proved divisive even within the British Zionist movement which, apart from Chaim Weizmann, supported the official World Zionist policy of neutrality. Some, such as the Zionist intellectual Ahad Ha'am, dismissed the notion that the Legion was necessary to prove Jewish fighting ability, writing to Trumpledor that: 'Your main argument is that the Legion will prove to whoever is in need of proof, that we are able to fight, and that, therefore we shall be able

⁷⁷⁸ Anglo Jewish Archive (hereafter AJA) MS 185

⁷⁷⁹ Letter from Rothschild to Landa 23 June 1918, AJA MS 185

to defend our Country. But I believe, that even without the Legion the Jews have sufficiently demonstrated their fighting capacity in all the armies that are at present engaged in the war'.⁷⁸⁰ As Kadish relates: 'On the issue of the Regiment, the generally accepted pattern of communal politics broke down'.⁷⁸¹ Matters were brought to a head when Patterson called a meeting of senior figures representing a broad cross-section of the various Jewish communities and factions, as well as individuals with an attachment or interest in the legion, at the WO on 8 August. This included the new president of the BoD Sir Stuart Samuel (Alexander having resigned after the debacle with *The Times* in May), Lord Rothschild, Chaim Weizmann, Leo Greenberg, Claude Montefiore, and many other leading Zionists and assimilationists.⁷⁸²

Patterson recalled in his memoirs that after fierce debate between Jabotinsky and Weizmann on one side and the present assimilationists on the other: 'I again addressed the meeting and said I thought it was a good thing the Government had not left it to the community to form a Jewish Regiment, as I saw that they would never agree; but as the Government had already made up its mind, and was determined to have a Jewish Legion of some kind, I begged them to lay aside all differences and help me to make a success of a movement which was bound to affect all Jews, one way or another, throughout the world. In conclusion, I said I would rather know who were my friends, and asked all those who did not intend to further this scheme, which after all was a scheme propounded and adopted by the British Government, to retire. Not a man moved.'⁷⁸³

In this manner, Patterson secured an uneasy acceptance of the reality of the Jewish Battalion on the part of the Jewish establishment, although many of those present perhaps felt they had been confronted by a *fait accompli* by Patterson, and to display an open hostility for the movement would be to court accusations of disloyalty to the nation and the community.⁷⁸⁴ Alyson Pendlebury interprets Patterson's position as that of the British Government's 'Zionist

⁷⁸⁰ Cited in Watts, *Jewish Legion*, p.102.

⁷⁸¹ Kadish, *Bolsheviks and British Jews*, p.223

⁷⁸² Watts, *Jewish Legion*, pp.104-105

⁷⁸³ Patterson, *With the Judeans*, p.8

⁷⁸⁴ Watts, *Jewish Legion*, p.105

Missionary', attempting to persuade a sceptical Anglo-Jewry that their interests were foremost in the government's plans for the Battalion.⁷⁸⁵ Service in his regiment, he argued, would instil dual national interests within Eastern European migrants through participation in a Zionist project that also saw them furthering the cause of the British Empire. The East London Jews would be 'normalised' through entry into nationhood.⁷⁸⁶

This did not, however, dispel fears amongst opponents of the scheme that the Jewish Regiment would ultimately disgrace the British Jewish community, and that Government support for the scheme was a pretext to the resettlement of British Jews in the Holy Land once it was firmly under British control. Patterson recounts a conversation prior to this meeting with an un-named prominent English Jew who opposed the Jewish Battalion and the ideology of Zionism chiefly because he 'had no desire to be chased out of my comfortable dwellings in Kensington to live in some wooden hut in the desert defending it from Arabs and the like'.⁷⁸⁷ The fear within certain sections of Anglo-Jewry that the reality of a Jewish homeland would lead to growing press and popular agitation for Jews in Britain to move there was a serious obstacle to the Battalion scheme. Resentments remained (evident not less than half an hour after the meeting, when Montefiore and Major Rothschild reported Patterson to his commanding Officer General Geddes for holding a Zionist meeting in the WO) and the Jewish Battalion would continue to be dogged by opposition originating within the leadership of established Jewry right up until its disbandment in 1922.⁷⁸⁸

The government's dramatic U-turn in 1917 from the previous administration's policy of making no official commitment to the cause of Zionism – and the Legion idea in particular – was based in part on the pro-Zionist sympathies of the Prime Minister Lloyd George and certain members of his Cabinet. This was consolidated by a series of positive meetings with Jabotinsky and Trumpledor in which the structure of the Legion was drawn up, and the

⁷⁸⁵ Alyson Pendlebury, *Portraying the 'Jew' in First World War Britain* (Valentine Mitchell, Edgware 2006), p.125

⁷⁸⁶ Ibid

⁷⁸⁷ Patterson, *With the Judeans*, P.8

⁷⁸⁸ Ibid, pp.9-10

favourable conditions for an offensive in Palestine in which the Legion's participation both symbolically and militarily was desirable for both parties. Added to this was the increased attractiveness of the Allies in the eyes of World Jewry with the fall of the Tsarist government in Russia and the entry of the USA on the Allies side with its large and influential Jewish population. The potential propaganda benefits to the Allies of exploiting Jewish world opinion through a clear display of sympathy with Zionism was increasingly evident to strategists in the WO as well as Cabinet members.⁷⁸⁹

It was not, however, primarily sentimentalism for the Holy Land within the Cabinet or a desire to court world Jewish opinion that motivated the official sanctioning of the Jewish Legion.⁷⁹⁰ It was a pragmatic realisation that it posed the best opportunity for the Government to solve the drawn out affair of the non-enlistment of Russian Jews. *The Times* reported on 17 July that in Stepney alone there were 4,000 Jewish absentees 'Avoiding service by every conceivable means' and just over a week later the paper ran a report on the local unrest caused by this amongst the Gentile population: 'Eight thousand Jewish aliens of military age are still living as civilians in Stepney and Hackney alone... "The ferment down here," a well-known Hackney resident said yesterday, "is rapidly becoming serious, and if the Government deals with the situation with a strong hand they will have the full support of the British population... [On the Russian Jews] They do not want to go to Russia. They do not want to fight for anybody... Conscience has not prevented them from making money out of war contracts and war work"' ⁷⁹¹

Following the agreement of the Military Service Convention between Britain and Russia on 16 July 1917, the Government was under greater pressure than ever to be seen to be enforcing this policy.⁷⁹² The closure of the FJPC and the arrest of its leader Abraham Bezalel in July 1917 is evidence of a tougher

⁷⁸⁹ See Levene, *The Balfour Declaration*

⁷⁹⁰ See Bar-Yosef, *The Holy Land in English Culture*

⁷⁹¹ *The Times*, 17 & 25 July 1917

⁷⁹² This convention allowed the Government for the first time to officially conscript Russian subjects into the British Armed Forces with the option of free naturalisation, and stated that those Russian subjects who wished to return to Russia must register to do so by 9 August. See Watts, *Jewish Legion*, P.97

approach,⁷⁹³ although Russian Jewish men continued to resist deportation and enlistment. In a private meeting a few months previously, the Home Secretary Lord Derby questioned Joseph Trumpledor on the possibilities of persuading Russian immigrants to serve in the Jewish Legion. Trumpledor replied 'If it is to be just a regiment of Jews – perhaps. If it will be a regiment for the Palestine front – certainly. If, together with its formation, there will appear a government pronouncement in favour of Zionism – overwhelmingly'.⁷⁹⁴ The WO would draw the same conclusion: if the men would not fight for Britain or for Russia perhaps they could be persuaded to fight for a Jewish homeland. It was felt also that the difficulties of incorporating the men within the British Army due to religious and language barriers rendered the Jewish Battalion more attractive to the WO as the solution to the conundrum. In effect the Russian Jews were presented with a third option: if deportation back to Russia and serving in the main British Army proved undesirable they had a final choice of serving in an all-Jewish Regiment. This was as close to volunteerism as Jabotinsky could hope for but the fact remained that the Russian Jews faced compulsion to choose one of these three options.

That some men chose none of these three options can be seen in the experiences of a Jewish resident of Whitechapel, Arnold Harris. Harris's family had fled Kovno Province in Poland to join other family members in London in 1900 when he was 6 years old. The family as a whole, and Arnold in particular, were heavily involved in Zionist organisations in the East End. The young Harris regularly attending Zionist meetings to hear the likes of Israel Zangwill and Moses Myer speak from street corners.⁷⁹⁵ This did not however equate to any interest on the part of Harris in Jabotinsky's Jewish Battalion. Mark Levene has extensively examined Harris' memoirs and speculates that he was interested in a brand of Zionism associated with Labour politics in the East End (possibly Paole Zion) which differed markedly from Jabotinsky's Zionist vision and was in principle anti-war. However, in Harris' own words 'I had made up my mind that I

⁷⁹³ Watts, *Jewish Legion*, p.97. The *East London Observer* reported that the FJPC were still holding anti-Legion meetings as late as August 1917 after the raids, revealing the strength in depth of the organisation. See Bush, *Behind the Lines*, p.181

⁷⁹⁴ Jabotinsky, *Jewish Legion*, p.87

⁷⁹⁵ cited in Mark Levene 'Going against the Grain: Two Jewish Memoirs of War and Anti-War, 1914–18', *Jewish Culture and History*, 2:2, (1999), p.77

would not surrender to the call-up, not for ideological reasons but from plain fear'.⁷⁹⁶

Harris paid £5 to a local doctor for a fraudulent note diagnosing myopia and when this was rejected by the Enlistment Office as unsuitable grounds for medical discharge, he visited a local boxer who had done well out of the war charging a fee for his 'expertise' – a precise punch to the side of the head inducing a perforated ear-drum. Harris decided against this extreme measure when the man couldn't guarantee the 'procedure' would not result in permanent deafness, and after seeking refuge in Ireland, Harris returned to London only at the end of the war. In his own words he had endured impoverishment and loneliness, and recognised he would have been better off enlisting, but resisted not for ideological reasons but simply from fear.⁷⁹⁷ The similar experiences on the run of John Rodker and the ready network of supporters to shelter them hints that many more continued to resist enlistment after the Convention came into force.⁷⁹⁸ This however reflects a wider war disillusionment in British society and the raft of military tribunals and press agitation against 'shirkers' and conscientious objectors reveals deeper national concerns that British men were not fulfilling their conscription duties, as was noted in chapter one.⁷⁹⁹ Fear was as significant a factor in resisting enlistment as the loss of livelihood. 1917 was the high water mark of the public's appreciation of the horrors of the Western Front, and the reality and actualities of death were much stronger in the potential recruits of 1917 than they were for the men of 1914.

Patterson's meeting at the WO in August had resulted in the acceptance of a Jewish Battalion by the Jewish establishment, but the role and significance that it would play within the history of the Jewish community of Britain was yet to be decided. The anti- and pro-Battalion camps vigorously sought to shape this role. Would the new unit constitute a means to engage idle Russian Jewish manhood through participation in a unit with a non-descript name in a

⁷⁹⁶ Ibid, p.80

⁷⁹⁷ Ibid, p.81

⁷⁹⁸ See Rodker, *Memoirs of Other Fronts*

⁷⁹⁹ The Military Tribunals in East London saw a raft of protest against the conscription of the working class and were led by local trade unions. See Bush, *Behind the Lines*, pp.57-58

peripheral sector; or, as Jabotinsky and Patterson hoped, would it represent symbolically and actually the fusion of British and Russian Jewry through the transfer of Jewish soldiers already serving in the forces and the ardour of the youth of Whitechapel mobilised in the cause of Zion?

The superficial shell of the Regiment, its name and insignia, was attached great significance by both parties, for the title 'Jewish Regiment' was deemed by both to encompass the war efforts of the Jewish community, for contemporaries and for posterity. Opponents of the Battalion scheme described this in negative terms, revealed in a WO minute detailing a deputation led by Lord Swaythling⁸⁰⁰ to General Hutchinson, the Director of Organisation at the WO, who recorded that:

The above named (Lord Swaythling, Major Rothschild and Mr. Montefiore) strongly object to this name [Jewish Regiment] – whether they represent any large section of Jews I cannot say – they think the Jews we are going to enlist will disgrace the name of the Jew. I do not care what the unit is called but we have already called it the Jewish Reg. in a Communique. The names suggested are:

Russian Jewish Reg.

Zion Regiment (Taken from the Zion Mule Corps in Egypt).

Macobean [sic] Reg.⁸⁰¹

Apart from revealing the general bafflement on behalf of the British authorities regarding the furore caused by the naming of the Regiment, the alternative names suggested by the deputation show how as far as possible the opponents of the Jewish Battalion wanted the unit to be disassociated from the main body of Anglo-Jewry. The controversy over the name threatened to destabilise the whole project, with Lloyd George becoming increasingly frustrated at the slow progress in the formation of the Battalion⁸⁰², and eventually the Secretary of State for War, Lord Derby, dropped the name in preference for a number: the

⁸⁰⁰ Son of Samuel Montagu - Liberal MP for Whitechapel 1885-1900. As we saw in chapter 2, Swaythling would go on to found the anti-Zionist *League of British Jews* a week after the Balfour Declaration in November 1917.

⁸⁰¹ PRO WO 32 11353. WO minutes 15-23 August 1917.

⁸⁰² See Watts *Jewish Legion*, p.110

38th Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers.⁸⁰³ In a reply to a pro-Regiment deputation, Derby defended his decision by arguing the title 'Jewish Regiment' was too encompassing: 'They must remember that there were many thousands of Jews serving in all branches of the British Army at the present moment who, in many cases, had earned themselves the respect of their comrades for their fighting capabilities'.⁸⁰⁴ He left open the possibility for the re-naming of the unit following distinguished service in the field and in time the Battalions would become known colloquially as 'The Judeans'. Once again however, Jabotinsky and other supporters of the Jewish unit project had been forced by latent hostility within the community and the specific needs of the government to compromise on an integral aspect of the project: the Jewish title that the world and posterity would acknowledge it by had been substituted for an anglicised one.

XVIII. The Jewish Battalions in Action: War Experience and Jewish Masculinity

At the end of August 1917, the WO sanctioned the creation of a depot at Crown Hill in Plymouth to which the Jewish conscripts would be sent to create the first unit: the 38th Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers (the 39th and 40th Battalion would be recruited in North America and Palestine respectively). Despite initially sluggish numbers of recruits and transfers⁸⁰⁵ the Battalion reached its required target of 1,200 members by November, and after intense training was ready for overseas duty by the beginning of February.⁸⁰⁶

It is important at this juncture to attempt to discover what lay behind the motivations of the men who chose to join the 38th battalion in 1917 rather than returning to Russia or choosing resistance like Arnold Harris and John Rodker.

⁸⁰³ PRO, WO 32 11353

⁸⁰⁴ Minutes of the Pro Regiment deputation to Lord Derby. AJA MS 185

⁸⁰⁵ Jabotinsky attributed this to elements in the WO under the sway of certain assimilationists holding back recruits, and to the chief Jewish reverend in the British Army Michael Adler advising Jewish soldiers not to transfer to the Jewish Legion. Jabotinsky, *Jewish Legion*, p.101

⁸⁰⁶ Watts, *Jewish Legion*, P.123

The testimonials of the veterans of the Jewish Legion stored at the Beit Hagudim Museum in Avichail, Israel, provide invaluable clues as to the men's motivations for enlistment. Only a fifth of the 7,000 soldiers recorded as serving in the various Battalions of the Jewish Legion are represented at Hagudim. The Museum houses just over 1672 testimonials of which 425 account for soldiers of the 38th battalion that was formed in September 1917 at the Crown Hill depot in Plymouth and to which the majority of the London-based recruits were sent. As an overview, the testimonials of the London recruits reveal several expected and some surprising pieces of information. Martin Watts' account of the testimonials affirms that over two thirds of the men recruited in Britain (an important proviso as over half of the 38th Testimonials concerned American and Canadian volunteers, reflecting the methodology of the museum's first curator in favouring these nationalities for a perceived commitment on their behalf to Israel over their British comrades) were in fact born in Britain. Watts also gives the average age of the recruits as 20 years old. This appears in line with the evidence that the vast majority of Jewish immigration from Russia took place in the late Victorian period and certainly before the Aliens Act of 1905. He also states that the vast majority of the recruits from Britain demonstrated little or no allegiance to Zionism.⁸⁰⁷

However, when only the troops recruited directly from London are examined, this picture changes. From a random selection of 54 veterans living in London in 1917 and who served in the 38th Battalion, 24 were born in England, 21 were listed as born within the Russian Empire and a further 9 did not list their country of birth. Less than half therefore were born in Britain and the majority of these had served in the British Army previous to transferring into the Jewish Legion (16 from 24, who actively listed prior service with other British Army regiments). These figures reveal that Russian Jews from the East End of London were actively prominent in the first drafts of the Jewish Battalion and casts doubt on the suggestion made by David Cesarani that the majority of males of military age had returned with the other Conventionists to Russia in August, or were

⁸⁰⁷ Ibid, pp. 130-133

interned in enemy alien camps on the south coast.⁸⁰⁸ Strengthening the impression that the Battalion contained many non-naturalised foreign Jews is the evidence of a post war report from The Jewish Regiment Committee (formed in August 1917 to raise donations to alleviate the needs of the new recruits) stating that it was necessary to send out text books to the camp in Plymouth and later to Palestine 'For the teaching of English to foreign-born members of the Regiment', and that many of the literary materials sent to the Battalion had to be translated into Yiddish, Russian, and other Eastern European dialects.⁸⁰⁹

What is also revealing is that contrary to Watts' assertion of a lack of Zionist affiliation on behalf of the recruits, 17 of the 54 London recruits from the same survey make at least some reference to Zionist activity in their testimonials.⁸¹⁰ These range from relocation to Palestine after demobilisation such as in the case of Frederick Phillips (whose testimonial lists him as 'a member of an old Anglo-Jewish family and the only member sympathising with the Zionist cause'⁸¹¹), to Mark Kerstein, a 'bespoke gentleman's tailor' from Whitechapel listed as 'A staunch Zionist at heart – He had a deep love of his Jewish religion and its traditions'.⁸¹² Others list more direct involvement in Zionist politics, for example Captain Samuel Barnet who found employment as a military judge in the British protectorate of Palestine after the war but resigned after accusing the administration of holding an anti-Zionist policy.⁸¹³ Whilst this does not reveal a collective Jewish nationalism on the part of the London recruits to rival that of the American and Canadian recruits of the 39th Battalion, it would suggest that the modern perception in Israel that the coerced nature of the English recruit's conscription limited their commitment to a Jewish homeland is unfair: the Jewish Legion attracted and nurtured pro-active Zionist supporters from the

⁸⁰⁸ Cesarani, *Embattled Minority*, p.68. Watts has shown that the *Jewish Chronicle* report of 25 January 1918 that 8,000 Russian Jews were being held at an internment camp in Maidstone was incorrect and that the figure was nearer to 800. See Watts, *Jewish Legion*, p.126

⁸⁰⁹ *The Jewish Regiment Committee Aug. 1917 to Aug 1919*. (London 1919), p.13

⁸¹⁰ Of the 55 London based recruits identifiable from the testimonials for the 38th, 17 mention Zionist activity, 14 displayed activity alluding to a strong British patriotism before and after service, and 14 did not display signs of either

⁸¹¹ Frederick Phillips testimonial, Avichael

⁸¹² Mark Kerstein testimonial, Avichail

⁸¹³ Samuel Barnet testimonial, Avichail

East End of London, but for the most part only after the threat of compulsion had been used.⁸¹⁴

In addition, there were high levels of transfers of Jewish soldiers serving in other units into the new battalion (about half of the men who joined the regiment in 1917 were transferees), the majority of who were British Jews.⁸¹⁵ The circular letter to representatives of the Jewish community sent by Myer Landa, the official secretary of the Jewish Regiment, stated: 'The large number of applicants from officers, non-coms, and men for transfer to the regiment indicates a strong sentiment in favour of the scheme on the part of those affected - those in the army or due to join. It proves also, that English-born Jews of all classes, are anxious to be associated with their Russian brothers.'⁸¹⁶

This was in itself a fairly self-serving appraisal of English Jewry's contribution to the Jewish Regiment, designed to soften hard attitudes amongst the elder statesmen of Anglo-Jewry of whom the letters were the intended target. There was however a clear desire on the part of the transferees to serve with their fellow co-religionists and on the whole an easy co-existence between Russian and English Jews within the camp at Crown Hill and later on campaign.⁸¹⁷ Russian Jews already serving in the British Army expressed interest in the Jewish Battalion project, such as Private J. Langle who wrote to Landa in September 1917: 'Being of Jewish birth, Polish born in Wilna, Poland, Russia, of Russian parentage and descent, I would very much like to transfer to the Jewish regiment amongst my co-religionists as I am at present the only Jewish private in our battalion'.⁸¹⁸ Others such as 2nd Lieutenant H V Oleef sought permission from their commanding officer to transfer to the Jewish units, Jack Davidson writing to Landa on his behalf that he was 'desirous of joining the Jewish Regiment. He is a splendid fellow full of sympathetic interest in the Jewish cause and widely experienced in East End Jewish club life'.⁸¹⁹ Whilst

⁸¹⁴ Shlomit Keren & Michael Keren 'The Jewish Legions in the First World War as a Locus of Identity Formation', *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies*, 6:1, (2007), pp.69-83

⁸¹⁵ Avichail Testimonials

⁸¹⁶ Circular letter 24 August 1917. AJA MS 185

⁸¹⁷ Patterson, *With the Judeans*, p.23

⁸¹⁸ Pte J Langle 58th T.R.B glamp, letter to Landa 3 September 1917, AJA MS 185

⁸¹⁹ Letter to Landa from Jack Davidson 27 August 1917, AJA MS185

most Jewish transferees were British born, these examples are a reminder that some Russian Jewish men did enlist in the British Army before the issue of Russian Jewish conscription reached crisis point in 1917. The experiences of isolation and loneliness hinted at in the reasoning of private Lancel's desire to join the regiment as 'I am at present the only Jewish private in our battalion', is comparable to the difficulties and occasional experiences of antisemitism suffered by Jewish soldiers serving in the British Army that were explored in chapter two. Of course the response to Landa's letter calling for Jewish soldiers to join the Jewish Battalion from regular British Army units was not universally popular. One man wrote to him in November 1917 stating 'I am not in sympathy with the movement which created a Jewish Regiment. I have two sons serving as officers in the army and as they and other Jews are on an equal footing with every other denomination I fail to see why the army should be divided into religious sections.'⁸²⁰

Despite this, those Jewish soldiers who did transfer are important in revealing the symbolic and actual appeal of the Jewish Legion. For these Jewish soldiers already serving in the British Army, the motivation for service in the Jewish Battalions ranged from the desire of some to be part of a momentous Jewish movement that inspired the imagination of Isaac Rosenberg, or more simply, in the case of David Dobrin from Hackney who had served in the Duke of Cornwallis Light Infantry, to serve with fellow Jews: 'This was the happiest time of my army service amongst my own people'.⁸²¹

Along with the controversies surrounding the naming of the Battalion, a further issue centring on the 'differentness' of the Jewish unit was the question of whether the specific religious requirements of the troops would be catered for by the authorities. As was discussed in chapter two, the British authorities faced mounting difficulties in meeting the needs of its Jewish recruits, particularly in the supply of kosher food, the recognition of Jewish holidays and the provision of Jewish chaplains to perform prayer services as well as burial rites for fallen

⁸²⁰ Hillient Hoch letter to Landa 22 November 1917, AJA MS185

⁸²¹ David Dobrin Testimonial, Avichail

Jewish soldiers. The Reverend Michael Adler attempted to meet these requirements, however the reluctance of the British Army to provide specific rations for its Jewish soldiers and the opposition within Anglo-Jewry by those who felt such measures would accentuate the differentness of Jewish soldiers, resulted in inadequate procurement for the needs of strictly orthodox Jewish soldiers on the front line.

The issue gained greater prominence with the formation of the Jewish Battalion in August 1917. Much of the positive propaganda Jabotinsky and others used to 'sell' the scheme to reluctant Russian Jews was based on how a Jewish-only unit would provide Jewish troops the ability to worship freely in the British Armed forces. Indeed, Patterson recalled the critical nature of the issue for the Battalion's success in his memoirs: 'Now I felt very strongly that unless the Jewish Battalion was treated as such, and all its wants, both physical and spiritual, catered for in a truly Jewish way, this new unit would be an absolute failure, for I could only hope to appeal to them as Jews, and it could hardly be expected that there would be any response to this appeal if I countenanced such an outrage on their religious susceptibilities as forcing them to eat unlawful food.'⁸²²

After the Army failed to make special provisions for Kosher food for the Jewish Battalion at the outset of its formation in August 1917, Patterson in his own words 'made such a point of this that I was at length summoned to the War Office by the Adjutant General, Sir Nevil Macready, who informed me that I was to carry on as if I had an ordinary British Battalion, and that there was to be no humbug about Kosher food, or Saturday Sabbaths, or any other such nonsense.'⁸²³ After Patterson threatened to resign over the issue, the WO softened its hard-line approach. Patterson received a WO communique on the subject on 14 September which stated that: 'as far as the Military exigencies permit, Saturday should be allowed for their day of rest instead of Sunday. Arrangements will be made for the provision of kosher food when possible.'⁸²⁴ Patterson referred to this as his 'Kosher Charter', which helped navigate around

⁸²² Patterson, *With the Judeans*, p.29

⁸²³ *ibid*

⁸²⁴ *Ibid*, p.30

the issue during the duration of the Battalion's training in Plymouth and whilst on active campaign in Palestine.

However, even with this endorsement from the WO, the exigencies for kosher procurement were often trumped by the realities of wartime shortages, and the supporters of the battalion were required to fund the shortfalls of the authorities in adequately providing for the troops' religious needs. The Jewish Regiment Committee used public donations mainly drawn from wealthy sympathisers within Anglo-Jewry (such as Leopold Frank who donated £1,000 to the Battalion⁸²⁵), to set up a canteen in Chenies Street that catered for the Jewish troops before their journey to join up with the Battalion in Plymouth. The Committee reported that 'the food and drink served to the men were specially prepared in accordance with the tastes prevailing among Russian Jews. The staple food was fish and sausages, and other palatable articles of diet such as chopped liver, herring, cucumber, etc, with brown bread and Russian tea, provided meals that were much appreciated.'⁸²⁶ On campaign, a combination of the use of Patterson's 'kosher charter' and the donations of the JRC muddled through to meet the men's needs. The first report of the Committee published after the war noted that the Sabbath and Jewish festivals were duly recognised by the military authorities, and the Passover Festival was in particular: 'celebrated with due regard to tradition, the committee contributing the extra cost of motzas, wine and haggadahs'.⁸²⁷

In this way, the Jewish troops wishing to maintain Kashrut and Shabbat whilst serving in the Jewish Battalions were on the whole able to, in contrast to the majority of Jewish troops serving individually across the British Army. It would appear that the WO was able and willing to demonstrate flexibility over the issue of Jewish soldier's religious requirements for three small and undersized battalions, but was less willing and perhaps logistically incapable of extending this practice to meet the needs of the thousands of Jewish troops

⁸²⁵ Other notable contributors to the subscriptions list were Zionist Organisation of London (£175 9s. 9d) Marks & Spencer Ltd (£157, s.10, d.0) Lord Rothschild (£63), The Jewish Chronicle ((£48, 2s, 6d) Mrs Nina Salaman (£3, 3s) and a rather paltry £2 2s on behalf of Israel Zangwill's wife.

⁸²⁶ *Jewish Regiment Committee*, p.9

⁸²⁷ *Ibid*, pp3-4

scattered across the hundreds of battalions of the British Army in the later stages of the war.

To relieve the boredom of camp life and to supplement their fitness training, the officers arranged boxing tournaments at the depot for the recruits. Boxing had a particular affinity with the immigrant Jewish population, honed in part by the struggle and conflict that characterised the tough living conditions of turn of the century East London. Jews were to a degree culturally segregated from the 'gentlemanly' sports of football and rugby that represented the backbone of English sporting culture and the instilling of principles of 'fair play', team ethic and technical ability expected of an English gentleman.⁸²⁸ That the Jewish immigrants were deemed lacking in these principles was a widely held Gentile prejudice extended to the Jewish community as a whole.

Bare-knuckle boxing, especially its seedier sub-culture in the back dens of East End drinking holes and gambling shops, was not deemed to be an activity fit for aspiring English gentleman, but the necessary fighting and physical abilities the sport demanded and the string of Jewish champions it produced in the late 19th and early 20th centuries are contrary to contemporary perceptions of the physical weakness of Jewish manhood. An East London resident, Bill Belmont, recalled in his memoirs following the exploits of the famous Jewish fighter Ted 'Kid' Lewis – born in Aldgate and winner of the World Welterweight title in August 1915 – 'Here was someone who could show that Jews did not have to take everything lying down, but could hit back – and hard.'⁸²⁹ Fighting in the ring was equated to and often a substitute for fighting on the battlefield – the Jewish boxer Mick Shulman in the 1931 novel *Magnolia Street* embodied the aggressive instincts of Jewish youth needed in the hard environment of Britain's inner cities: 'He yearned to be a soldier. His nostrils sniffed for the blood of Germans. He was a member of the Jewish Lad's Brigade, and because its members included no Germans, he was not permitted to attack them with

⁸²⁸ See David Dee, 'The Sunshine of Manly Sports and Pastimes': Sport and the Integration of Jewish Refugees in Britain, 1895–1914', *Immigrants & Minorities*, 30:2-3, (2012), pp.318-342

⁸²⁹ Bill Belmont, 'As I Recall', in Venetia Murray, *Echoes of the East End* (Viking, London 1989). p.167

swords or bayonets. So he boxed them instead... In 1916, a lad of 10, he is the most grim jawed patriot in Magnolia Street. Woe upon Kaiser Wilhelm should he and Mick Shulman meet one dark night in the back-entry'.⁸³⁰

Jewish recruits at Crown Hill relished the chance to display their fighting prowess in the boxing tournaments held in the autumn and winter of 1917. The testimonial of one recruit, Alexander Berger, mentions little about his activities with the Jewish Legion apart from that 'I won the boxing championship in the army. I still have the cup that I won.'⁸³¹ Jabotinsky relates that the London recruits 'Proved to be the best boxers in the whole British Army in Palestine, defeating, one after another, the champions of all other regiments, so that in the final match in Cairo between "England" and "Australia", it was our soldier Burak who represented England'.⁸³² Jabotinsky does not state whether Burak won or not. After success in the early rounds of the competition that included representatives from every unit of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force, Pattison remarked dryly: 'The first round of this essentially British form of sport had been fought and won by the despised Jewish Battalion!'⁸³³ The displays impressed Patterson, and went some way to allaying the fears raised in him by the initial experiences of military training for the new recruits, as he makes clear in his memoirs: 'the men came from sedentary occupations. They had never been accustomed to an outdoor, open-air life, and naturally dreaded, and really felt, the strain of the hard military training which they had to undergo in those cold winter days at Plymouth'.⁸³⁴

One Officer in particular who shared Patterson's concerns was one of the transferees, Henry D Myer. Born in 1892 to a wealthy Jewish family in Bayswater London, Myer rejected his father's offer to send him to the Jewish House at Clifton College opting instead for the traditions of Westminster School.⁸³⁵ He was, as he readily confessed, little interested in his Jewish heritage and considered himself a fervently patriotic Englishman, with a

⁸³⁰ Louis Golding, *Magnolia Street* (Five Leaves, Nottingham 2006) (orig. pub. 1932)

⁸³¹ Alexander Berger testimonial, Avichail.

⁸³² Jabotinsky, *Jewish Legion*, p.160

⁸³³ Pattison, *With the Judeans*, p.192

⁸³⁴ Patterson, *With Judeans*, p.21

⁸³⁵ Myer, *Soldiering of Sorts*, p. 4.

particular penchant for the English military tradition fostered by childhood memories of Kitchener's march on Sudan and the wild excitement of the relief of Mafeking.⁸³⁶ Myer joined the Territorial Army in 1908 and served with them initially in France upon the outbreak of the First World War before he joined the City of London Rifles 1st Battalion and was injured at the Battle of Loos in September 1915 and later witnessed the full horror of the war in the Passchendaele offensive during the summer and autumn of 1917. Whilst convalescing after another injury, Myer received a telegraph from the WO requesting his transfer into the Jewish Battalion.⁸³⁷ Despite accepting the commission, Myer had his doubts: 'I felt that every anglicised, or even partly anglicised Jew would have long ago joined the Armed services, for this had been my experience and that of my older cousins and friends doing social among these communities. I reckoned that in London, Leeds, Manchester, Glasgow, Cardiff and the like, the men who would be of poor material in a military sense'.⁸³⁸

Myer joined too late to sail with the 38th Battalion in March 1918 but was assigned an Officer of the 39th Battalion. Whilst praising his fellow Jewish Officers, he was scathing of the regular Jewish recruits (which in March 1918 consisted of 400 men left over from the 38th): 'The Tailors, the boot-makers, cabinet-makers and other typical East Enders' and 'these men were types to whom soldiers and soldiering were anathema and were to be evaded at almost any cost. The daily sick parade consisted on average, of 100 men... It would have reflected badly on the Anglo-Jewish community had it been ventilated in the National Press, because few people would have understood how men, who and whose relatives owed so much to the hospitality they had enjoyed in the United Kingdom, could have refrained from showing gratitude in the form of sharing burdens, which fell upon all Britishers'.⁸³⁹ Myer was merely repeating the concerns expressed by Anglo-Jewish leaders that the Russian Jewish recruits and their poor performance in action would taint the Jewish community as a whole, but his repeated assertion that the recruits were 'poor material'

⁸³⁶ Ibid

⁸³⁷ Ibid, p.93

⁸³⁸ Ibid, p.79

⁸³⁹ Ibid, p98

reflects that some British Jews shared Gentile stereotypes of the weak nature of immigrant Jewish manhood and were concerned that this would feed wider caricatures of Jewish physical weakness on the part of the community at large.

Whilst Myer was a reluctant transferee, another Jewish man from a polar opposite background was desperate to transfer into the battalion: the Whitechapel poet Isaac Rosenberg. A 28 year old Russian Jewish poet raised in the poverty-stricken district of Whitechapel, Rosenberg encapsulated to a fascinating degree the complexities of the East London Jewish community's response to the First World War. Disconnected and diffident, Rosenberg shunned wider Gentile and Jewish society alike. His biographer Deborah Maccoby described him as having 'Little interest in Hebrew studies, synagogue worship and religious rituals'.⁸⁴⁰ He found solace in the company of a select group of East London poets and artists such as John Rodker, Joseph Leftwich and David Bomberg – the so called 'Whitechapel Boys' – whose isolation in their trade mirrored the detachment of the bulk of Jewish masculinity in the East End.⁸⁴¹

Despite this, Rosenberg volunteered for service in the British Army in October 1915 seven months before the introduction of conscription. Yet his poems and letters from the trenches reveal a continuing sense of isolation and detachment from the war and from British and Jewish concerns. The formation of a British Army regiment manned specifically by Jewish soldiers in the summer of 1917 filled for Rosenberg this void in national identity, re-orientating his own sense of belonging with the cause of a Jewish Homeland. It inspired a series of vehemently Zionist poems culminating in 'These Cold Pale Days', written about the Jewish Regiment two days before his death and equating its existence and cause with the spiritual and actual re-awakening of Jewish Nationalism. The line 'They see with living eyes how long they have been dead' expresses the full three millennia of the Diaspora witnessed by the soldiers of

⁸⁴⁰ Deborah Maccoby, *God Made Blind: The Life and Work of Isaac Rosenberg* (Symposium Press, Northwood 1999), p.1

⁸⁴¹ A loosely-knit association of Anglo-Jewish writers based in Whitechapel in the early 20th century, the group also contained Marc Gertler, Jacob Kramer and the artist and sculptor Clara Birnberg, the only female member. For more on the groups' wartime experiences see Rachel Dickson & Sarah Macdougall, *Whitechapel at War: Isaac Rosenberg & His Circle* (Ben Uri Gallery, London 2008)

the Regiment as they draw it to a close, the modern re-embodiment of the soldiers of the Kingdom of Judah.⁸⁴²

For Rosenberg and the men who would serve in it, the Jewish Battalion provided meaning for their involvement in the war, and instilled in many a layered set of identities – a community-based identity centred on their professions, but also a Jewish identity built on pride in participation with a Jewish cause and concurrently a British identity shaped by service – however reluctantly for many – in the British Army. Rosenberg’s father had left Russia to avoid military conscription and brought his family to London, living seven to a room in a tenement in Cable Street, Stepney. Poverty was a constant theme of Rosenberg’s youth and early adulthood, and his experiences of struggle, neglect and victimisation in the streets of East London fed and shaped a theme of alienation within his poetry shared by his friendship group of East End Jewish artists and poets.⁸⁴³

His formative years living in a Jewish community in a slum district of an English city instilled no particular sense of Jewishness or conversely any particular attachment to Britain in the young Rosenberg, and he differed outwardly and emotionally little from the majority of disaffected Jewish youth that frustrated Jabotinsky in 1916. His mother attempted to persuade him not to enlist, a not untypical occurrence as Deborah Maccoby relates: ‘The greatest dread of immigrant Jewish mothers from the Russian Empire was that their sons would be conscripted into the army; it brought back all their memories of the army in Russia, in which the Jewish soldiers had been so ill-treated that many of them had died before even reaching the front, and those who did reach it were treated as cannon fodder.’⁸⁴⁴

Like Rodker, Rosenberg deplored war, writing to his friend and benefactor Sydney Schiff: ‘I have changed my mind again about joining the army. I feel about it that more men means more war – besides the immorality of joining with

⁸⁴² Ian Parsons, (Ed.), *The Collected Works of Isaac Rosenberg: Poetry, Prose, Letters, Paintings and Drawings* (Chatto and Windus, London 1979), p71. For a more in-depth discussion of Rosenberg’s Zionist poems see Daniel Harris, ‘Rosenberg in the Trenches: Imagining King David’s World’, *Jewish Culture and History*, 5:1, (2012), pp.1-28

⁸⁴³ Dickson, *Whitechapel at War*, p.167

⁸⁴⁴ Maccoby, *God Made Blind*, p.76

no patriotic convictions'.⁸⁴⁵ However, unlike Rodker, he did not actively resist enlistment,⁸⁴⁶ and with his poverty reaching absolute levels and hearing that his mother would receive a signing on bonus, Rosenberg joined the army in October 1915: 'I could not get the work I thought I might so I have joined this Bantam Battalion (as I was too short for any other) which seems to be the most rascally affair in the world... Besides me being a Jew makes it bad amongst these wretches. I am looking forward to having a bad time altogether'.⁸⁴⁷ In this respect his motives were similar to many English recruits who saw service as an escape from poverty made more inescapable by the economic dislocation of the war.⁸⁴⁸ Rosenberg had not previously been known to harbour any interest in Zionism – his friend Joseph Ascher recalled 'I cannot remember that Isaac was especially Jewish or Zionistic in his outlook...'.⁸⁴⁹ Rosenberg however would almost certainly have heard from friends and relatives of Jabotinsky's East End recruitment drive for a Jewish Legion in 1916 and 1917, and it is this that seemingly jolts him from an empty sense of national identity to an attachment to the cause of Jewish nationalism.⁸⁵⁰ Rosenberg was deeply moved by reports he received of the march of the Battalion through Whitechapel in February 1918, and declared in a letter to his patron Edward Marsh: 'I wanted to write a battle song for the Judeans but can think of nothing strong and wonderful enough yet.'⁸⁵¹

Where before in his poems there had been a lack of Jewish subject to the extent that he has largely been identified within the Anglo-Christian tradition of poetry, he now produced a series of powerfully Zionist poems such as 'The Burning of the Temple' and 'The Destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonian

⁸⁴⁵ Letter to Sydney Schiff October 1915. Cited in Parsons, *Collected Works of Isaac Rosenberg*, p.219

⁸⁴⁶ Rodker, *Memoirs of Other Fronts*, pp.111-112

⁸⁴⁷ Letter to Sydney Schiff October 1915. Cited Parsons, *Collected Works of Isaac Rosenberg*, p.219

⁸⁴⁸ See Mansfield, *English Farmworkers and Local Patriotism*, p.89

⁸⁴⁹ Joseph Ascher quoted in, Jean Liddiard, *Isaac Rosenberg: The Half-used Life* (Victor Gollancz Ltd, London 1975), P57

⁸⁵⁰ Rosenberg received community news from friends and relatives regularly and was home on leave in September 1917. Daniel Harris states: 'Rosenberg also knew of Jabotinsky's creation of the Jewish Regiment, after over two years of embattled politicking in Whitehall and Whitechapel, whose tangled streets housed thousands of alien Russian Jews like Rosenberg', Harris, *Rosenberg in the Trenches*, p.3.

⁸⁵¹ Letter to Edward Marsh 28 March 1918. Cited in Parson, *Collected Works of Isaac Rosenberg*, p.272

Hordes', linking himself spiritually with the contemporary movement to avenge the diaspora and reclaim the Holy Land as a Jewish home that the Legion represented.⁸⁵² He actively attempted to transfer into the new battalion, writing to his friend Gordon Bottomley in March 1918: 'I am trying to get transferred to the 'Judeans'. I think they are now in Mesopotamia. Jacob Epstein whom I know is with the Judeans, and several other friends of mine'.⁸⁵³ His final poem, 'These Pale Cold Days', sees the Jewish future looking with 'dark faces' and 'wild eyes' beyond the ravaged and war-torn landscape of Europe towards 'the pools of Hebron again'; the hope and promise represented by the reclamation of Palestine sought by the Jewish Legion was for Rosenberg his war aim.⁸⁵⁴ Having signed up to alleviate the financial pressures on himself and his mother and like many Russian Jews professing a hatred for militarism and disinterest in nationalism, the Jewish Battalion and the reclamation of the Holy Land became for Rosenberg and many of the soldiers who served in the Jewish Battalions a cause justifying their service in the British Army.

Before embarkation to Palestine, the regiment was granted the honour of a march through the East End of London, from Tower Hill through Aldgate and Whitechapel and ending in Stepney. The *Jewish Chronicle* (its editor Leo Greenberg having reconciled himself to the Jewish Battalion, but not sufficiently to refer to it as such, preferring the less inclusive term 'Judeans') celebrated the upcoming parade with unbridled enthusiasm and hyperbole: 'It will be the first time that a Regiment consisting entirely of Jews will have tramped the streets of England, and the march of the Judeans will be a picturesque reminder of how history is being made in these days, here and in Palestine'.⁸⁵⁵

On Monday 4 February the Battalion paraded through the heart of the Jewish East End, and in contrast to the hostile reception that greeted Jabotinsky in the dark days of failed recruitment meetings, the Russian Jewish community greeted the Battalion with overwhelming support: 'There were tens of

⁸⁵² Harris, *Rosenberg in the Trenches*, p.1

⁸⁵³ Letter to Gordon Bottomley, March 7th 1918. Cited in Vivien Noakes (Ed.), *The Poems and Plays of Isaac Rosenberg* (Oxford University Press, Oxford 2008), p.360

⁸⁵⁴ Harris, *Rosenberg in the Trenches*, pp.17-18

⁸⁵⁵ *JC*, 1 February 1918

thousands of Jews in the streets...women crying with joy, old Jews with fluttering beards murmuring, 'shehechianu' [the thanksgiving prayer for 'reaching this day']...the boys...shoulder to shoulder, their bayonets dead level...proud, drunk with the national anthem, with the noise of the crowds, and with their sense of a holy mission'.⁸⁵⁶ This is not the response we might expect from a community that had vainly resisted a war eventually thrust upon it, and reveals, at least after the event, community patriotism for the Regiment and its cause. The enthusiastic public response to the march-by mirrored the positive reception enjoyed by the 17th Stepney and Poplar Battalion during the unit's marches through the East End in August 1914, discussed in section one of this chapter. The remarkable nature of the comparison lies in the context behind the local support. The crowds cheering the 38th battalion in February 1918 were not the optimistic and excitable masses of August 1914 that steadfastly supported Britain's cause, but members of a nationally maligned immigrant community that had shown indifference to Britain's war aims and were by 1918 fully aware of the horror of modern industrial warfare. Despite this, Patterson recalled: 'As we approached the Mile End Road the scenes of enthusiasm redoubled, and London's Ghetto fairly rocked with military fervour and roared its welcome to its own. Jewish banners were hung out everywhere, and it certainly was a scene unparalleled in the history of any previous battalion.'⁸⁵⁷ Anglo-Jewry – and former opponents of the Regiment – were determined to maximise the propaganda potential the march presented in demonstrating Jewish commitment to the war effort and its oneness with Britain. The Chief Rabbi proclaimed at the blessing of the Regiment at Camper Down House: 'In the great struggle in which they were to take their part, British ideals were consistent with Jewish ideals'.⁸⁵⁸ To commemorate the event the Anglo-Jewish poet and active Zionist Nina Salaman (whose husband Radcliffe Salaman became the Battalion's medical officer in Palestine) wrote the 'Marching Song'

⁸⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁵⁷ Patterson, *With the Judeans*, p.33

⁸⁵⁸ Cited in Bush, *East London Labour*, p.183

of the Judeans in February 1918, which later would become a popular ballad sung by the Judeans on campaign.⁸⁵⁹

After the march, the 38th Battalion embarked from Portsmouth and sailed via Italy to Egypt, to be joined subsequently by the 39th Battalion, formed predominantly of American and Canadian volunteers, and the 40th Battalion, consisting of the remainder of the recruits from the 38th (that Henry Myer had been so critical of) and locally recruited Jewish volunteers from Egypt and Palestine. The experience of the Battalions was mixed and certainly did not live up to the expectations of Patterson, Jabotinsky and the project's supporters at home.⁸⁶⁰ The men performed well, particularly during the Jordan Valley offensive in June 1918, but were repeatedly side-lined and given inconsequential and laborious tasks, something Patterson attributed to an element of prejudice towards the Battalion within the Egyptian Expeditionary Force and influenced by certain forces within established Jewry hostile to the

⁸⁵⁹ Nina Salaman, *Songs of Many Days* (London 1923). P.33. See also Keren, *We are Coming, Unafraid*, p.78.

Full poem:

"Zion, our Mother, calling to thy sons,
We are coming, we are coming to thine
aid.

Spread among the nations, we thy loving ones,
We are ready, we are coming, unafraid.

All along the ages thou wert lying waste,
We were waiting, we were looking to the goal.
Thou wert always calling, calling us to haste;
We were hoping and we heard thee in our
soul.

Other men have found thee but a stony height;
It is we can bring the blessing to thy soil—
Only we, thy children, precious in thy sight—
We shall prove thee, we shall save thee by our
toil.

Zion, our Mother, now thy sons depart;
We are coming while thou watchest there
alone.
Heart amid the nations, beating with our heart,
We are ready, we are coming—we, thine own."

⁸⁶⁰ Watts, *Jewish Legion*, pp.198-200

Battalion – revealing that the deep divisions opened up by the Jewish Battalion scheme within the community had never fully healed.⁸⁶¹

The Commander in Chief of the EEF, General Allenby, was particularly sensitive to winning the hearts and minds of the Arab communities in the region and did not want to jeopardise the chances of this by being seen to favour a regiment of Jews, who he privately complained had been thrust upon him and served no military value.⁸⁶² The Battalions had missed sharing in the glory and publicity of the fall of Jerusalem the previous November, and the whole theatre was to a large extent overshadowed in the British public's perception of the war by the dramatic and decisive developments on the Western Front in 1918. Following the Armistice with Turkey in November 1918, the three Battalions acted as a peacekeeping force in the newly titled *British Protectorate of Palestine* before becoming surplus to requirements and disbanding in 1922.

Conclusion: Legacy of the Jewish Battalions

The majority of the recruits raised in Britain returned there after disbandment, never to return to Palestine. This has been contrasted with the high proportion of American and Canadian troops who remained in Palestine, and has been used to argue, by Watts and by Shlomit & Michael Keren, that the Jewish recruits from Britain were not interested in Palestine or Jewish nationalism and had been compelled into service.⁸⁶³ The reality was more complex: whilst the majority avoided enlistment until the Convention forced their hand, they chose to serve in the Jewish Legion over returning to revolutionary Russia or serving elsewhere in the British Army. It has been shown previously how serving in the Jewish Legion awakened in many a Jewish nationalism, revealed in examples of involvement in Zionist organisations and activities upon returning to England and declarations of solidarity with the Jewish settlers in Palestine and lamentations that circumstances had not allowed them to return that litter the testimonials at Avichail. However, the testimonials also hint that service in the

⁸⁶¹ Patterson. *With the Judeans*, p.57

⁸⁶² Watts, *Jewish Legion*, p.163

⁸⁶³ Keren, *The Jewish Legions*, pp.69-83

British Army and pride in the victory won bred a certain degree of British patriotism amongst a number of the recruits, with involvement in wider society outside of the traditional spheres of the immigrant community listed in post war activities, and specifically the pride many recruits experienced from performing air warden and firefighting services in the Second World War.

One of the more surprising transformations affected by service in the Jewish Legion was experienced by Henry Myer. Myer had reluctantly transferred to the Battalion out of a sense of duty, but was impressed by the commitment of the Palestinian recruits he came in contact with in the 40th Battalion describing them as 'well developed mentally, and physically they are men' and 'worthy representatives of the race'⁸⁶⁴, and was impressed with their commitment to Zionism. Writing to his fiancée Louie Solomons in January 1919, he wrote 'I am only a sympathizer with their views and not an active Zionist'⁸⁶⁵, but sympathy with Zionism represented quite a turnaround for the ultra-patriotic Englishman who had previously shown only muted acknowledgement of his Jewish ancestry. This to an extent might also be explained by his earlier experience within the British Army in France discussed in chapter two and worth repeating here briefly: 'there was a substantial number of Gentiles who either did not understand or did not want to associate with, or even disliked British Jews, no matter how assimilated they were, or appeared to be'.⁸⁶⁶

Antisemitism, if not as rife on the British Home Front as David Cesarani has suggested during the war years, had been a persistent reality within the British Army since the Boer War, and dimmed for those British Jews who experienced it a previously unvanquished sense of Britishness, replaced in the case of Henry Myer by a lost Jewish identity nurtured by his experiences with the Judeans in the Holy Land. The issue of the Jewish Battalion further widened the already deep divisions opened by the war between the established community and the immigrant population of London, and brought into the open the conflict between the pro- and anti-Zionist camps that would dominate Jewish politics in

⁸⁶⁴ Myer, *Soldiering of Sorts*, p.125

⁸⁶⁵ Letter to Louie Solomons 16 January 1919. *Soldiering of Sorts*, p.159

⁸⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p.79

the interwar years.⁸⁶⁷ The legacy of the Jewish Battalion proved to be neither the disastrous humiliation of the whole community opponents of the project feared nor the crowning glory of the Jewish war effort hoped for by Jabotinsky. The unit was largely lost in the euphoria and upheavals of the end of the war and the small occasion that it did register with the British public was to reinforce Jewish stereotypes. During the march through Whitechapel in February 1918 *The Times* reported (falsely) that after the parade of the 38th Battalion had finished, the majority of the troops deserted.⁸⁶⁸

The Jewish Battalions did however represent a tangible watershed for the Russian Jewish community and contributed to the painful process of integration into British society through its belated sacrifice in the war, attested by the many recruits who did not return home.⁸⁶⁹ Its existence proved a powerful source of civic pride for the Jewish community, and a sense of shared struggle alongside the wider Gentile society that proved the baptism of fire for a community previously in transition. For the soldiers that served in it, many returned home imbued with a degree of Jewish nationalism and pride in Britain's victory that helped to fill a previous lack of self-identity individually and on behalf of the community. Ironically this transformation was perhaps most completely encapsulated in one soldier who did not even serve in the Battalion. Isaac Rosenberg requested transfer into the Jewish Legion but did not get a reply: 'I've heard nothing further about the J.B and of course feel annoyed – more because no reasons have been given me - but when we leave the trenches, I'll enquire further'.⁸⁷⁰

Two days after writing this letter he was killed by a sniper whilst on sentry duty. *These Pale Cold Days* was a dedication to the Jewish Legion, and remains a powerful testament to the symbolic power of the unit to instil a national identity where it was previously lacking.

⁸⁶⁷ See Levene, *War, Jews, and the New Europe*

⁸⁶⁸ Cesarani, *Embattled Minority*, p.75

⁸⁶⁹ See Jewish war dead listed in Adler, *British Jewry Book of Honour*

⁸⁷⁰ Letter to Marsh 2 April 1918, cited in Parsons, *The Collected Works of Isaac Rosenberg*, p.276

Through these pale cold days

What dark faces burn

Out of three thousand years,

And their wild eyes yearn,

While underneath their brows

Like Waifs their spirits grope

For the pools of Hebron again –

For Lebanon's summer slope.

They leave these blond still days

In dust behind their tread

They see with living eyes

How long they have been dead.⁸⁷¹

(Isaac Rosenberg 1892-1918)

⁸⁷¹ Parsons, *The Collected Works of Isaac Rosenberg*, p71

Conclusion: Legacy and Significance of London Jewry's Great War

The high proportion of English Jews who served in the British Army relative to the size of the community was a powerful source of Jewish pride during and after the war, and was championed as irrefutable evidence of the patriotic fulfilment of the community's national duty. Approximately 10,000 Jewish men volunteered for service in the British Army prior to the introduction of conscription in January 1916. Jewish men were motivated to enlist for a multitude of reasons: need for adventure or to escape the boredom of civilian life; 'peer pressure'; or local patriotism i.e. protection of kith and kin. These largely matched national motivations for enlistment, as Nicholas Mansfield's and Adrian Gregory's works in this area have shown.⁸⁷² However many Jewish men enlisted to demonstrate their patriotism and dispel accusations of 'shirking'. Jews faced accusations of shirking their wartime responsibilities as early as the first weeks of August 1914, before any enlistment figures could be widely disseminated. The image of Jewish men as keen to avoid military service was fuelled by pre-war stereotypes of Jews as unmanly and cowardly, and therefore more prone to avoid service than the 'brave and patriotic British tommies' of the pals battalions. Such characterisations were largely disproved as the war progressed by the significant numbers of Jewish volunteers reprinted in the *Jewish Chronicle*, and the widespread evidence assessed in chapter two demonstrates the relatively conventional experiences of Jewish soldiers regarding bravery, physical exertion and co-existence with non-Jewish troops on the frontline.

English Jews that enlisted voluntarily as soldiers represented a 'shield of patriotism' to defend the community from accusation of disloyalty, and their service provided a powerful source of pride for the integrated community in the

⁸⁷² Mansfield, *English Farmworkers*; Gregory, *Last Great War*

interwar period. The patriotism of established Jewry was driven partly by the need to combat press agitation against the alleged anti-Entente sentiment of the community, but also by a perceived pressure to fulfil an 'Emancipation obligation' (the contemporary notion of a 'blood tax' owed by emancipated minorities to the dominant power in times of war – most notably felt by Jews living in France and Germany in 1914-1918).⁸⁷³ The First World War witnessed sporadic anti-German rioting in the British Isles and the denunciation of Prussianism, fundamentally rooted in a general acceptance that it was the antithesis of what the British represented. It has been argued in this thesis that Jews were under increasing scrutiny to demonstrate their national loyalty towards Britain during this period of heightened discussion regarding the nature of British patriotism, and it was this that partially drove the elevated patriotic displays of established Jewry in August 1914.

However, the desire of the established Jewish leadership to be seen by the government and the British public as united and fully integrated into the nation's war effort was foiled by the non-enlistment of 30,000 Russian Jews, a controversy that brought unwanted attention and scrutiny. Russian Jewish non-enlistment was a sensitive issue for the Jewish community, and one that provided a contentious and highly visible point of difference in the eyes of the British public. It is important though not to exaggerate the extent to which the Jews were an exception in resenting and even avoiding military service in Britain, and even other belligerent nations. As Derek Penslar has pointed out, the vast majority of men who fought in the First World War did so not as volunteers but because they were compelled to, and even amongst the most ardently nationalist sector of the British population, the urban idle classes of the British bourgeoisie, war enthusiasm had dwindled significantly by 1916.⁸⁷⁴ When the British Government did introduce conscription in July 1916, 93,000 British citizens failed to report for army duty, and three quarters of a million more initially claimed one form of exemption or another.⁸⁷⁵ For every Jewish applicant to the military tribunals in 1916 that met the ire and contempt of the

⁸⁷³ Derek Penslar, 'An Unlikely Internationalism', p.309

⁸⁷⁴ Derek Penslar, *Jews and the Military, a History* (Princeton University Press, Oxford 2013), p.169

⁸⁷⁵ Lloyd, *Jews under Fire*, p.236

East London Observer, there were proportionately as many non-Jewish citizens seeking exemptions on largely similar grounds.

Intra-communal relations between the established and immigrant contingents of London's Jewish community, already tense before the war, were greatly exacerbated by the conflict. In 1881 the Jewish population of London was 46,000. By 1900 it stood at 135,000; by the eve of the First World War it had risen to perhaps as high as 180,000.⁸⁷⁶ In the words of Geoffrey Alderman 'Merely from a demographic viewpoint this amounted to a revolution', and placed serious strain on the institutional and social framework of established Jewry, and the impoverished condition of many of the arrivals threatened to embarrass the community.⁸⁷⁷ The Jewish authorities subsequently initiated an aggressive acculturation policy towards the recent immigrants in an attempt to forcibly incorporate them into the fabric of British society. This policy, driven by the internal and external pressures to eradicate Jewish differentness in the eyes of the nation, contributed to the frenzied patriotism of the early war years. The heavy handed attempts of Jewish recruiting committees to force the issue of Russian Jewish non-enlistment led to the disillusionment with, and separation from, West End leadership by the immigrant community. This attempt to force the internal integration of immigrant Jews, as much as external British pressure to display national rather than communal loyalty, transformed the concept of national and religious allegiances for Jews in Britain.

The issue of Zionism as a war aim of the struggles of 1914-18 critically divided established Jewry. Many argued the fruits of Jewish exertion in the war could and should be a Jewish homeland, but a significant element of the London Jewish elite saw only an unwanted deportation to Palestine and resisted it vigorously. This factionalism within Anglo-Jewry was most notably seen in the press battle between Leo Greenberg's *Jewish Chronicle* and Leo Wolf's anti-Zionist paper the *Jewish Guardian* that polarised Jewish opinion throughout the inter-war period.⁸⁷⁸ The growth of political Zionism in Britain

⁸⁷⁶ Alderman, *British Jewry*, pp.117-118

⁸⁷⁷ Ibid

⁸⁷⁸ See David Cesarani, *The Jewish Chronicle and Anglo-Jewry 1841-1991* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1994)

during the First World War split established Jewry and further deteriorated the ability of the community to find consensus on non-Zionist Jewish matters.

The 1914-1918 conflict further strained the already hostile relations between Jews and non-Jews in the East End. The rejection of Jewish appeals to relief committees in several East London districts in the economic crisis of the first weeks of war in August 1914 hint at this underlying tension and reveal the hollowness of patriotic sentiments calling for collective endeavour that was not extended to the area's minority residents. Economic competition between Jews and non-Jews in the East End, bubbling under the surface in 1914, flared up again as the result of the profits accrued by Jewish tailors during the war. The 'Khaki Boom' enjoyed by Jewish tailors after 1915 revived pre-existing economic concerns amongst the English working class following decades of Jewish encroachment into their perceived historic industries. These sentiments were inflamed further by the perception that these profits were accrued at a time when a significant number of English workers were enlisted in the British Army. This economic rivalry between Jewish immigrants and the English working class of the East End provided the context to the Russian Jewish conscription crisis that dominated race relations in the East End in the later years of the war. The external pressures of rationing and bombing raids added to the impression that Jews and Gentiles in the East End were fighting separate wars. A direct result of this was the violent anti-Jewish disturbances witnessed on the streets and back alleys of Bethnal Green in September 1917. The riot, whilst specifically anti-Jewish in intent, can be placed within a historic pattern of English East End 'economic xenophobia' towards competing migrant communities that was expressed through physical violence, which in turn was intensified by the cumulative impact of rationing, military service, a vitriolic local press, and the terror brought by the Zeppelin raids.

By the autumn of 1918 however, tensions between the British and Jewish contingents in the East End had cooled. The imminent prospect of victory coupled with the normalisation of economic conditions reduced the war stress that had seen resentments intermittently flash into violence. From the low of the Bethnal Green riot in September 1917, Jewish and British workers decreasingly saw themselves in direct competition with each other. This was due largely to

the strengthening of British labour organisations and Jewish trade unions in the East End, most strikingly demonstrated by the joint action by Jewish and Gentile unions before the Committee of Production to defend worker's rights within the tailoring industry.⁸⁷⁹ Shared wartime hardships with the Gentile community forged social and economic bonds which paradoxically were strengthened, not ruptured, by the controversy and antagonism surrounding Jewish non-enlistment. The furore this caused acted as an important tipping point for a community in transition since 1881 and which had already exhibited incremental evidence of integration before the war. Many of the more ardently anti-British and least acculturated members of the Jewish East End had returned to Russia in the wake of the double revolutions of 1917. For those that remained, belated war service in the British Army fostered a greater sense of commitment and involvement within British society. The monetary gains made by Jewish tailors as a result of the 'Khaki boom' formed the basis for many budding Jewish entrepreneurs to forge successful businesses that eventually relocated out of the East End in subsequent decades. The enforced enlistment of thousands of Russian Jews into the Jewish Battalion in August 1917 instigated a degree of support for Britain's cause where before there had only existed apathy. Service in the British Army with the Jewish Battalion, and pride in the victory won, bred a certain degree of British patriotism amongst a number of the recruits, with civic involvement outside of the traditional spheres of the *shtetl* in post-war activities indicated in their testimonials in Avichail.

To assess the significance of the First World War and its legacy within the context of the later development of Anglo-Jewry in the 20th Century and beyond, it is important to trace the ongoing processes from 1914-1918 that continued into the interwar period. The thesis has examined a series of examples of how the First World War led to both a rise in animosity and anger as well as co-operation and co-existence between Jews and non-Jews. To assess whether the war represented a unique event that temporarily transformed Jewish and Gentile relations in London or contributed to an

⁸⁷⁹ See Bush, *East London Jews War*, p.157.

acceleration of a longer-term process of change, it is important to move the picture forward into the decades directly proceeding the end of the conflict. This thesis has argued that the tensions and controversies of the war divided the established and immigrant parts of British Jewry, resulting in two autonomous Jewish communities in 1918. However, it will be argued here that the long-term ramifications of the war would actually realign the competing groups both politically and socially, by accelerating the process worked for by established Jewry since 1881: the anglicisation of the Jewish East End. It is important to consider here that many of these processes, particularly the split between the established and immigrant Jewish communities, had been set in motion many years before the outbreak of the First World War. The extent to which the war acted as a catalyst for these changes must also be judged in the context of the events shaping the decades proceeding 1918.

The 1905 Aliens Act had greatly reduced Jewish immigration into Britain. The effects of this could already be seen during the war, with two thirds of the recruits of the Jewish Battalions having been born in Britain (although the pattern for the London recruits is less conclusive, with half-born in Britain and half originating in Russia). The war itself was to accelerate this process further. The Aliens Restrictions Act of 1914 was ratified and strengthened in 1919, virtually eliminating further Jewish immigration into the East End. By 1930, foreign-born Jews were an increasingly small minority of the overall Jewish population.⁸⁸⁰ The profits of the war years provided the basis and impetus for the later movement away from the East End for many Jewish families and businesses. In 1889, 90 per cent of Jewish families in London lived in the East End. Forty years later however, this had fallen to just 60 per cent, the majority leaving to seek greater space and opportunities north of the City.⁸⁸¹ The Russian Revolution saw the departure of thousands of the most radicalised and anti-integrationist members of the Jewish intelligentsia, and the chaos and horror that followed the Bolshevik coup severed for many the final links with the old country.⁸⁸² A more subtle path of integration accelerated by the First World

⁸⁸⁰ David Cesarani, 'A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Suburbs: Social Change in Anglo-Jewry between the Wars, 1914-1945', *Jewish Culture and History*, 1:1, (1998) p.6

⁸⁸¹ Ibid. p.8

⁸⁸² See Sharman, *Bolsheviks and British Jews*

War was the process of anglicisation of Jewish food - or rather, the anglicisation of Jewish food tastes. Wartime shortages and the imposition of rationing restricted the ability of many Jewish families to uphold Jewish dietary laws and forced them to adopt British culinary habits. This was compounded by returning Jewish soldiers used to daily bacon rations in the Army, the Chief Jewish reverend of the British Army Michael Adler having issued a special exemption from observing Sabbath and dietary laws for the duration of the war for Jewish troops.⁸⁸³ Sam Stern's restaurant in Stepney - one of the most popular kosher restaurants in the East End during the interwar period - boasted typical Jewish food but also served many English dishes, and a menu would not look out of place in any 1930s British restaurant.⁸⁸⁴ Jewish workers in the East End began enjoying the leisure pursuits of the English working class, particularly the dance halls and the billiards rooms. For many, this was a legacy of the fraternisation with English workers during military service, or the shared dangers of the Home Front.⁸⁸⁵ Whilst this process of integration would no doubt have occurred naturally over time without the war, the evidence discussed in Chapter one suggests the war played a crucial role in accelerating integration. Four years of war accomplished more for their aims than thirty-three years of forced attempts by the Jewish establishment to integrate the immigrant community.

However, peace in 1918 also brought fresh sources of tension between Jews and non-Jews in the East End. Returning English soldiers lamented the loss of business and jobs taken over by immigrant Jews in their absence. The actions of a few unscrupulous Jewish landlords charging exorbitant rents to Gentile families struggling to rebuild after the war led to community-wide defamation of Jewish business tactics. Walter Southgate, born in Bethnal Green in 1890, reflected ruefully on the situation he and his wife found themselves in post-war, struggling to pay the rent to their Jewish landlords who in Southgate's words 'Arrived in this country penniless from the ghettos of Poland to escape the pogroms; they had made money and were prosperous. Here we were two supplicants for two back rooms and a gas ring in our native borough, and here

⁸⁸³ Interview with Reverend Arthur Bennet on the de-Judaising experience of the Army, *JC* 28 Feb 1919

⁸⁸⁴ Cited in Panayi, *Anglicisation Jewish Food*, p.301

⁸⁸⁵ Cesarani, 'A Funny Thing Happened', p.6

was the emergence of the race hatred trouble due to lack of housing'.⁸⁸⁶ Such sentiments helped revive the fortunes of the British Brothers' League in the early 1920s, the group that had led the fight against further immigration into the East End before the war. After the disbandment of the BBL in 1923, anti-immigrant support shifted to the British Union of Fascists. Unlike the BBL which had been careful to cultivate an anti-immigration rather than anti-Jewish agenda (in the best traditions of civil antisemitism employed by many pre 1905 anti-immigrant agitators, and lucidly identified by Lara Trubowitz⁸⁸⁷), the BUF was vocally antisemitic in its activities and ambitions.⁸⁸⁸ The party made significant gains at the local London County Council elections of March 1937, polling particularly strongly in Bethnal Green and Shoreditch, although ultimately failing to secure the election of any of its candidates.⁸⁸⁹

These relative election successes were preceded six months before by the fabled clash between the BUF and anti-fascist groups during a march through Cable Street on 4 October 1936. Largely forgotten in the immediate aftermath of the violence, the event has subsequently developed a central position within British collective memory, to the extent that Tony Kushner labelled it 'excluding events connected to the royal family and world wars, the most remembered day in British history'.⁸⁹⁰ In its importance to this study, there are certain parallels that can be identified between the events of October 1936 in Cable Street and those of September 1917 in Bethnal Green. The scale, celebrity and circumstances of these events offer little source for comparison, but it is interesting to hypothesise that many of the protagonists on both sides in 1917 may have taken part in the later event. The disaffected English youths responsible for the violence in 1917 would have grown to adulthood in the 1920s during a period of intense social dislocation in the East End created by post war reconstruction. The widely held notion that the Jews were responsible for the housing crisis in interwar London was a powerful recruiting issue for the

⁸⁸⁶ Southgate, *That's the Way it is*, p.124

⁸⁸⁷ See Trubowitz, *Civil antisemitism*

⁸⁸⁸ See Tilles, *British Fascist antisemitism*

⁸⁸⁹ Robert Benewick, *Political Violence and Public Order: Study of British Fascism* (Allan Lane, London 1969), pp. 279-282

⁸⁹⁰ Tony Kushner, & Nadia Valman, *Remembering Cable Street: Fascism and Anti fascism in Britain* (Frank Cass, London 2000), p.283

BUF, and it is possible, and perhaps probable, that the anti-Jewish agitators of 1917 swelled the ranks of the BUF in 1936.

The Battle of Cable Street may not in fact be the most remembered day in British history, but the claim is not without some merit. Almost forgotten in the upheavals of another world war, it has been re-remembered by subsequent generations placing their own assessment of how the events of that day fit into concepts of British nationalism, tolerance and defence of minority interests. This is in stark contrast to the remembrance of the events of 1917, which initially occupied significant newsprint and attention in both Jewish and non-Jewish circles, but subsequently faded from popular local consciousness and now occupies little more than a footnote in most modern assessments of Jewish race relations in the 20th century.⁸⁹¹ Despite this, Bethnal Green can be argued to have had a significant impact on Jewish and non-Jewish relations in London after the war. The same tensions that sparked the disturbances in Bethnal Green in September 1917 continued and intensified in the interwar period, directly motivating the 'Anti-Jewish' behaviour of Oswald Mosley's Black Shirts 19 years later.

However, it is possible to identify a further legacy of the First World War Jewish experience in the circumstances of the Cable Street violence. A high number of working class and labour activists were represented amongst the anti-fascist crowds that assembled to prevent the BUF's deliberately antagonistic march through a Jewish neighbourhood. Whilst defence of the Jewish community was not perhaps the overriding motivator to oppose the BUF for the majority of the diverse 100,000 crowd of anti-fascist demonstrators, perhaps we can identify here the legacy of the tentative links made between Jewish and British trade Unions in the closing stages of the First World War. These ties were developed in the months after the Bethnal Green riots as Jewish interest groups sought to prevent future violence and secure the economic and social security of the Jewish East End by improving ties with

⁸⁹¹ Perhaps a more apt comparison here would be with the anti-Jewish riots of 1947 in Manchester, Liverpool and Glasgow. Sparked by anger at the murder of two British army sergeants by Zionist paramilitaries in Palestine, the riots caused extensive damage to Jewish property but like Bethnal Green in 1917 has largely faded from public memory. see <http://www.newstatesman.com/2012/05/britains-last-anti-jewish-riots>

English Labour interests.⁸⁹² Indeed, the bulk of the younger British born Jewish working class of the 1930s was largely indistinguishable from their non-Jewish equivalents in terms of culture, aspirations and appearance for any perception of difference to be negligible. This is reflected in the writings of the *Jewish Chronicle* journalist William Zukerman in 1937 who argued there was 'so much in common between the young post-war English Cockney and the young East End Jew', and that 'what goes under the name of the East End Jew is in reality no specific Jewish type at all, but a general East London labour type'.⁸⁹³ Yearning the loss of the Jewish East End of his 1930s childhood, Aubrey Rose reminisced: 'This was my upbringing, my rich Jewish world, not a world of violence, but of peaceful, poor but happy characters... That world has vanished. Attempts to recreate it cannot succeed. The times have changed, the people have gone. It was a natural world, a stepping stone from the ghetto of Eastern Europe to increasing integration into British society'. But it was the First World War that did most to speed up the transition from Eastern European character to cockney working class identity of the Jewish East End.⁸⁹⁴

Tony Kushner has suggested that by the late 1920s a 'new cultural symbiosis had been reached between Jew and non-Jew in the East End' based on class and professional ties, and shared social and cultural activities centred around East End working class sports, football, boxing and horse betting predominating.⁸⁹⁵ The reality of this symbiosis, acted out in Rose's idyllic memories of the inter war East End, is problematized by the tensions surrounding post war reconstruction and the later emergence of local support for the BUF's anti-Jewish agenda. However the emersion of the old immigrant Jewish population within the working class culture of the East End - the 'cockney-fication' of the Russian Jews - had reached an advanced stage by the end of the twenties. No longer identified as an economic threat or encroaching into a traditional English area, immigrant Jews had largely transitioned from outsiders to part of the fabric of the East End. This process had begun in

⁸⁹² For a more detailed assessment of these links between Jewish and non-Jewish labour groups at the end of the war see Bush, *East London Jews War*, pp.157-159

⁸⁹³ *JC*, 12 December 1937; quoted in David Rosenberg, *Facing up to Antisemitism: how Jews in Britain countered the Threats of the 1930s*. (ARP Publications, London 1985), p.9

⁸⁹⁴ Rose, *Old East End*, p.16

⁸⁹⁵ Tony Kushner, 'Jew and non-Jew in the East End: towards an anthropology of "everyday" relations', in Alderman, *Outsiders and Outcasts*, pp.44-45

embryonic form in the decades before 1914, however the four years of war that followed accelerated this process exponentially.

The perception that 30,000 Russian Jews deliberately withdrew from the war effort whilst simultaneously profiting from it lent powerful ammunition to the anti-immigrant agendas of groups such as the BBL and the BUF after the war.⁸⁹⁶ Such negative perceptions of Jews as both unwilling and unfit for military service lingered, not only casting a shadow over the exploits of the Jewish Battalions in 1918, but also to an extent animating attitudes to Jewish recruits in the 1939-45 conflict. Full conscription for all males aged between 18 and 41 was passed by the National Service Act the day war was declared on 3 September 1939. The vast majority of Jews in Britain fell under the jurisdiction of this Act, preventing the situation of thousands of visible and un-enlisted Jews on the streets reoccurring as in the earlier conflict. The Jewish East End mobilised for war in 1939 without contention or controversy, the *Jewish Chronicle* reporting satisfactorily that Jewish East Enders were 'playing their part'.⁸⁹⁷ Jews were as prominent in the self-defence forces as the main British Army, and there is evidence that many former members of the Jewish Battalions served in the various volunteer emergency services created to protect Britain from invasion in 1940.⁸⁹⁸ The formation of a new Jewish Battalion to fight against Hitler faced few of the political obstacles within the Anglo-Jewish establishment or sneers from the British public as the first venture in 1917, and watching the future recruits on parade was one of Jabotinsky's last acts before his death in August 1940.⁸⁹⁹ The late formation of the Jewish Brigade as it came to be known in September 1944 was due not to internal political wrangling within Anglo-Jewry as in the First World War, but by the Government's reluctance to sanction a Jewish unit in light of the government white paper of 1939 that effectively revoked the Balfour Declaration, and the war ministry was reluctant to make an overtly Zionist statement whilst it was still

⁸⁹⁶ as discussed in chapter one this figure was hard to quantify accurately, but was a popularly employed statistic that was widely believed during the war

⁸⁹⁷ Cited from Tony Kushner, *The Persistence of Prejudice: Anti-Semitism in British Society during the Second World War* (Manchester University Press, Manchester 1989), p.51

⁸⁹⁸ See discussion of Avichail testimonials at the end of chapter three.

⁸⁹⁹ See foreword by J H Patterson in Jabotinsky, *Jewish Legion*. For more on the Jewish Brigade in the Second World War, see Howard Blum, *The Brigade: an Epic Story of Vengeance, Salvation, and WWII* (Harper Perennial, New York 2002)

in effect. In this regard the British Government's attitude to the concept of a Jewish Battalion in the Second World War largely mirrored that of its predecessor in the earlier conflict.

This did not, however, prevent a repetition in some circles of popular First World War jibes against the Jewish community. The BUF's populist paper, *Action*, revived the earlier accusation that Jews were shirking their wartime responsibilities while brave British soldiers fought at the front, writing in November 1939 that the nation would 'shortly have British Tommies at the front while alien Jews take their jobs at home'.⁹⁰⁰ Later in 1940 the BUF accused Jews of attempting to profiteer from the war, an accusation that bares comparison to those made against Russian Jews by the *East London Observer* during the 'Khaki Boom'.⁹⁰¹ Support for the BUF was dwindling by the outbreak of the war, but their activity had not slackened and their prime target remained primarily the Jewish East Ender. Len England, of the Royal Army Ordnance Corps, was interviewed by Mass Observation on 14 February 1941: 'There is a great deal of anti-Semitism in the army: there are no Jews in our battalion, and the feeling is not so much directed at individuals as at the race. It is not confined to the 'rank and file', two of the most intelligent people I have yet met are confirmed Jew-baiters. The argument usually runs like this: where are the Jews in the army? There are none because they all managed to get the soft jobs and have wangled out of conscription. In just the same way, the Jews were always the first to leave the danger areas. The Jews hold the purse-strings, the country has been taken over by them. Individual Jews may be pleasant enough, but as a race they are the root of all evil'.⁹⁰²

The views held by Len England and his fellow comrades in his battalion are stated authoritatively but are far from necessarily representative of British Gentiles across the Army, and are even further from being an instructive indicator of British society's concept of Jews and Jewish matters during the Second World War. It is somewhat easier to gauge the response to Jews by

⁹⁰⁰ Cited in Kushner, *Persistence of Prejudice*, p.19

⁹⁰¹ Cited in Ibid, p.19

⁹⁰² Len England, Royal Army Ordnance Corps, Hinckley Leicestershire. Friday 14 February 1941 cited in Sandra Koa Wing (Ed.) *Mass observation: Britain in the Second World War* (The Folio Society Ltd, London 2007)

ordinary British civilians in the Second World War than the First. The Mass Observation experiment revealed a fuller picture of British attitudes to Jews and other minorities that are unavailable for the historian of the earlier conflict. A Mass Observation report into antisemitism in Britain just before the outbreak of war in 1938 reveals a general ambivalence towards Jews by other East Enders, with Jews generally tolerated, if not liked.⁹⁰³ A greater propensity to journal and diary keeping during the Second World War also provides further evidence, whilst memoirs detailing experiences of the First World War were predominantly written after 1945 and therefore must be treated with caution, due to the phenomena of remembering the events of the earlier conflict through the prism of the more recent war. In general, public support for BUF attacks on Jews during the war against Hitler appears low, although BUF meetings in Bethnal Green were often well attended. Sporadic outbreaks of violence against Jews occurred in the northern districts of East London during the war; Jewish shops in Bethnal Green were attacked and windows smashed as early as the first few weeks of hostilities, an uncomfortable echo of the destruction witnessed in the same area in September 1917.⁹⁰⁴

It appears however, that war pressures had less to do with the violence than pre-existing tensions regarding the encroachment of Jews into areas such as Hackney, Stoke Newington and Dalston. The movement north of Jewish families into traditionally non-Jewish areas of the East End was a trend originating in the upheaval and transformation experienced by East End Jewry in the 1914-1918 conflict. The profit of the 'Khaki boom' and the accelerated process of acculturation linked to the conflict led to a gradual but continuous movement away from traditional areas of Jewish settlement, predominantly towards the north London suburbs, the northern districts of the East End witnessing the early onset of this movement. Interestingly, the *East London Observer*, which rarely missed an opportunity to condemn the Jewish East End community in 1914-1918, was largely sympathetic to the community during the 1939-45 conflict, the paper's editor going as far as writing to the Board of

⁹⁰³ Mass Observation report into antisemitism 1938, cited in. Kushner, *Persistence of Prejudice*, p.48

⁹⁰⁴ For the violence in Bethnal Green see *JC*, 24 Nov 1939, cited in *ibid* p.59

Deputies to support 'the Jewish point of view'.⁹⁰⁵ This shift, which was matched by former critics of Jewish immigrations such as the *East London Advertiser*, is perhaps explained by the general opposition to fascist groups such as the BUF that characterised the East London press in the 1930s. Overall, Jewish and non-Jewish relations improved as the war progressed, with the inclusivity of the danger and struggle of the blitz reducing intolerance. This largely matched the pattern of the First World War.⁹⁰⁶ To a large extent, the experience of the Second World War by British Jews and attitudes towards them were influenced by the memories and events of the First World War.

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The First World War permanently transformed the appearance and position of London's Jewish community. The war had a profound impact on Jewish and non-Jewish relations in the capital, redefining British concepts of the position of the Jewish community within London society, as well as individual Jews' notions of identity and patriotism in connection with Britain. The war did not however result in a 'serious deterioration in the position of the Jews in Britain' as David Cesarani has argued. On the other hand, William Rubinstein's assessment that 'No other event in modern British history so positively affected the acculturation of British Jewry in a brief period of time as did the First World War' must also be treated with caution.⁹⁰⁷ In his attempts to debunk Cesarani, Rubinstein characterises the war as remarkably free of British antisemitism. This narrative is however as notable for what he leaves out than in, brushing over or ignoring quite glaring evidence that would contradict such an assessment.

Cesarani points to a number of instances during the war where 'the Jews were rendered distinctive and problematic' in the eyes of the British public.

⁹⁰⁵ Cited in Ibid, p.61.

⁹⁰⁶ Not including here the conscription crisis and the Russian Revolution, issues that saw short term spikes in anti-Jewish sentiment.

⁹⁰⁷ Rubinstein, *History of the Jews Great Britain*, p.194.

However, this does not, as Cesarani implies, necessarily lead to the disintegration of the community's position. These instances are offset by equally numerous examples of how the war diminished differences between Jews and non-Jews in London and strengthened the position of London Jewry, either in the greater clout Anglo-Jewish politicians wielded in the aftermath of the Balfour Declaration, or the prosperity enjoyed by Jewish tailors in the East End that contributed to the decision of many immigrant families to set down permanent roots in London, both physically and psychologically.

Rubinstein's scathing attacks on the pessimism of the 'new School' of historians of Anglo-Jewry in the 1980s and 1990s was returned with withering contempt that his research attempted to turn the clocks back to the apologeticism of the Roth era. Subsequent research into the topic of British Jews and the First World War has largely attempted to steer clear of this battlefield, with Jill Hamilton (2004), Alyson Pendlebury (2006) and Anne Lloyd (2012) grounding their analysis of the British Jewish experience of the war from a Christological perspective, therefore sidestepping traditional debates on antisemitism. In recent years antisemitism has been increasingly discarded by historians of British Jewry as a tool to investigate British responses to Jews.⁹⁰⁸ The British Jewish story lacks the shock and awe narrative associated with continental antisemitism, and therefore must be grounded in an examination of more subtle and sensitive trends characterised by an emphasis on 'ordinary lives and everyday culture'.⁹⁰⁹ Since the Rubinstein and Cesarani debates of the 1990s brought an uneasy stalemate, such an approach has not been applied in an extensive way to the experience of British Jewry in the First World War, and in particular in assessing the legacy of this experience. The framework of success or failure for assessing the legacy of the war for British Jews should be set aside for an approach that acknowledges the complexities and contradictions in the Jewish war experience. Such an approach needs to be unaligned with the competing schools within British Jewish studies that

⁹⁰⁸ Jill Hamilton, *God, Guns & Israel: Britain, the First World War and the Jews in the Holy Land 1914-1925* (Sutton Publishing, London 2004); Pendlebury, *Portraying 'the Jew'*; Anne Lloyd, 'Between Integration and Separation: Jews and Military Service in World War I Britain', *Jewish Culture and History*, 12 (2012)

⁹⁰⁹ Tony Kushner and Hannah Ewence (Eds.), *Whatever Happened to British Jewish Studies?* (Vallentine Mitchell, London 2012) P.25

polarise theoretical debates on the topic. Using the case study of London Jewry, this thesis has attempted to apply this approach to the First World War experience. The changes to London's Jewish community in the years 1914-1918 were a complex mix of the subtle and dramatic, and the war cannot adequately be cast as a wholly negative or positive catalyst for societal regeneration in the Jewish case. This partisanship detracts from attempts to interpret the gritty contemporary experience of Jews adjusting to the calamities of war, preventing a true assessment of the First World War as a defining event in the development of British Jewry in the 20th Century.

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